

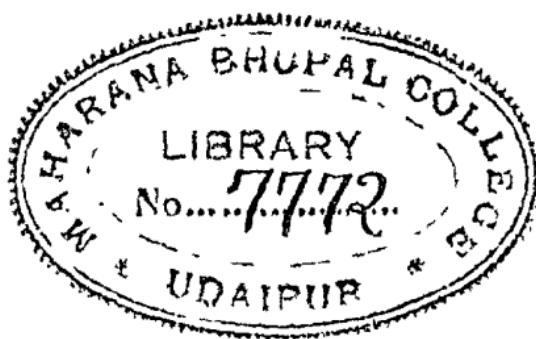
CHEKHOV

# ANTON CHEKHOV

## SHORT STORIES

*English Translation by*

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## BELATED BLOSSOM

### I

It happened on a dark autumn afternoon in the house belonging to the Princess Priklonsky.

The old Princess and her daughter Princess Marusya were standing in the young Prince's room wringing their hands and imploring. They were imploring him as only unhappy weeping women can implore: for Christ's sake, for God's sake, for the sake of honour, for the memory of his father.

The Princess stood before him motionless and weeping.

Giving free vent to her tears and her speech, interrupting Marusya at every word, she showered reproaches on the Prince mingled with hard and almost abusive words, caresses and entreaties. A thousand times she reminded him of the merchant Furov, who had protested their bills, of his deceased father, whose bones were now turning over in his coffin, and so on. She even reminded him of Doctor Toporkov.

Doctor Toporkov was a mote in the eyes of the Princess Priklonsky. His father had been their serf Senka, and the late Prince's valet, Nikifor, his uncle, from his mother's side was still acting as valet to the young Prince Egorushka. While Doctor Toporkov himself had in his early childhood been cuffed for having cleaned the Prince's knives, forks, boots and samovar badly. And now he—was it not stupid?—a young brilliant doctor, lived like a gentleman in a

devilishly fine house and drove about with a pair of horses as if to spite the Priklonskies, who went about on foot, and bargained for a long time when they had to take a cab.

"He is honoured by everybody," the Princess said shedding tears, which she did not wipe away, "he is loved by everybody, he is rich, handsome, he is received everywhere. . . . Your former servant, Nikifor's nephew! It's a shame to say it! And why? Because he behaves well, he is not dissipated, he does not frequent bad company. . . . He works from morning to night. . . . And you? My God! Oh Lord!"

Princess Marusya, a girl of about twenty, as pretty as a heroine of an English novel, with beautiful flaxen curls, and large clever eyes, the colour of the southern sky, implored her brother Egorushka with no less energy.

She and her mother spoke at the same time, and she kissed her brother on his prickly moustache, which exhaled an odour of sour wine, she stroked his bald head and his cheeks, and pressed to his side like a frightened little dog. She said nothing but endearing words. The young Princess was incapable of saying anything to her brother, that had the slightest remembrance to reproaches. She loved her brother so much. To her mind her depraved brother, Prince Egorushka, a retired hussar officer, was the expression of the highest truths and the model of the greatest virtues, she was certain, certain to fanaticism, that this drunken simpleton had a heart, that all the fays in the fairy tales might envy. She saw in him an unsuccessful, misunderstood, unappreciated man. She forgave him his drunken dissipation almost with joy. Why not, indeed!

Egorushka had persuaded her long since, that he only drank from grief, that he was drowning in wine and vodka a hopeless love, which was consuming his soul, and that in the embraces of dissolved girls, he was trying to drive *her* beautiful image out of his hussar mind. And what Marusya, what woman is there, who does not consider love a satisfactory excuse for a thousand delinquencies? Where is she?

"Georges!" said Marusya pressing close to him and kissing his drunken red nosed face. "You drink to drown grief, it is true. . . . But forget your grief, if it is so. Is it possible that all unfortunate people must drink? Endure, have courage, fight against it. Be brave. With an intellect like yours, with such an honest loving soul, one can bear the blows of fate. Oh, all you unsuccessful people are poor-spirited. . . .

And Marusya (forgive her, reader) remembered Turgenev's Rudin and began to talk about him with Egorushka.

Prince Egorushka lay on his bed and looked at the ceiling with his tiny red eyes. He had slight noises in his head and in the region of his stomach, he felt a sort of pleasant repletion. He had just had his dinner, he had drunk a bottle of claret and was now smoking a three copeck cigar and enjoying his leisure. The most diversified feelings, and ideas swarmed in his muddled brain and in his gnawing little soul. He was sorry for his weeping mother and sister, and at the same time, he had a strong desire to turn them out of his room—they were preventing him from dozing—from snoring. He was angry that they dared to give him a lecture and at the same time he was troubled by small (probably only very small) qualms of conscience. He was stupid, but not so stupid as not to understand, that the house of

Priklonsky was really perishing and partly by his fault. . . .

The Princess and Marusya entreated very long. The lamps were lighted in the drawing-room, and a guest arrived, but they still continued to implore him. At last Egorushka got tired of lolling on his bed. He rose with a noise and said :

“ All right, I will reform ! ”

“ On your sacred word of honour ? ”

“ May God punish me ! ”

His mother and sister seized hold of him and made him swear once more on his word of honour. Egorushka swore again on his word of honour, and said that the lightning might strike him dead, on that very spot, if he did not cease to live a disorderly life. The Princess ordered him to kiss the icon. He kissed the icon and crossed himself, three times. In a word, the oath was taken in the most proper way.

“ We believe you ! ” the Princess and Marusya said, and they both hastened to embrace Egorushka.

They believed him. How could they not believe his most sacred word of honour, his dispairing oaths and his kissing of the icon, all taken together ? Besides, where there is love—there unceasing trust is also found. They revived, and beaming like Jews who rejoice at the restoration of Jerusalem, they went to celebrate Egorushka’s new birth. When their guest had departed, they sat down in a corner and began to talk in whispers of how Egorushka would reform, and live a new life. They came to the conclusion that Egorushka would have a brilliant career, and would soon improve their affairs and they would not have to suffer extreme poverty—that shameful Rubicon—which all who have squandered their substance, must cross. They decided

that Egorushka was sure to marry a rich and beautiful girl. He was so handsome, clever, and so illustrious, that it was scarcely possible a woman could be found, who would dare not to be in love with him. In conclusion the Princess told the biographies of his ancestors, whom Egorushka would soon begin to imitate. The grand-father of the Priklonskies had been an ambassador and spoke all the languages of Europe, his father had been the commander of one of the most celebrated regiments, his son would be . . . would be . . . what would he be?

"Well, you will see, what he will be!" the young Princess concluded. "You will see!"

When they put each other to bed they continued for a long time to talk about the beautiful future. When they fell asleep their dreams were most delightful. They smiled in their sleep with happiness—so beautiful were their dreams. Fate most probably sent them those dreams to recompense them for the terrors they were to experience on the following day. Fate is not always niggardly: sometimes she pays in advance.

At about three in the morning, exactly at the time the Princess was dreaming of her baby in a general's brilliant uniform, and when Marusya applauded her brother in her dreams, for a wonderfully brilliant speech he had made, an ordinary hired drozhky drove up to the house of the Princess Priklonsky. In the drozhky a waiter from the Château-de-Fleurs was seated holding in his arms the noble body of Prince Egorushka, who was dead drunk. Egorushka was lying in the waiter's arms in the most complete state of unconsciousness, swinging about like a goose, whose throat had just been cut and was being carried to the kitchen. The driver jumped off his box and rang at

the front door. Nikifor and the man-cook came out, paid the fare, and carried the drunken body up the stairs. Old Nikifor was not surprised nor was he frightened, his accustomed hand undressed the motionless body, placed it deep into the feather bed and covered it up with the blankets. The servants did not say a word. They had long since become accustomed to see in their master something that had to be carried, undressed, covered up, and therefore they were not at all surprised or alarmed. To see Egorushka drunk was to see him in his normal state.

The next morning they were terrified.

At about eleven o'clock, when the Princess and Marusya were drinking coffee, old Nikifor came into the room and reported to their Excellencies that something was wrong with Prince Egorushka.

"One must suppose that he is dying!" Nikifor said.  
"Have the goodnesss to come and see."

The Princess's and Marusya's faces became pale as a sheet. A piece of biscuit fell out of the Princess's mouth. Maruysa upset her cup and pressed both her hands to her breast, in which her agitated heart began to throb unexpectedly.

"At three o'clock last night he returned home probably a little worse for liquor,"—Nikifor continued his report in a shaky voice,—“as usual. Well, and now, God only knows why, he is tossing about and moaning. . . .”

The Princess and Marusya, clasping each others hands rushed into Egorushka's bed-room.

Egorushka, pale to greenness, with tousled hair and looking much thinner, was lying under a thick woollen blanket breathing heavily, trembling and tossing about. His head and hands did not remain quiet for

an instant, but moved about convulsively. Groans were torn from his breast. A small red particle hung from his moustache, it was evidently blood. If Marusya had stooped down to his face she would have noticed a small wound in his upper lip and the absence of two of his upper teeth. His whole body exhaled heat and the fumes of spirit.

The Princess and Marusya fell on their knees and began to sob.

"We are to blame for his death!" Marusya exclaimed seizing her head in her two hands. "Yesterday we vexed him with our reproaches and . . . he could not bear it! He has a tender soul! We are to blame, *maman*!"

And in the consciousness of their culpability, they opened their eyes wide, their whole bodies trembled and they pressed closer to each other. People tremble and press together in that way, when they see the ceiling above them is about to fall down with a terrible noise and crash and crush them under its weight.

The man-cook had the good sense to go for a doctor. Doctor Ivan Adolfovich arrived, he was a little man, who seemed to consist entirely of a large bald head, stupid pig-like eyes, and a round stomach. They could not have been more pleased to see their own father. He sniffed at the air in Egorushka's bedroom, felt his pulse, drew a long breath and frowned.

"Your Excellency need not be uneasy!" he said to the Princess in a supplicating voice. "I don't know, but in my opinion, your Excellency, I don't find that your son is in great, how should I put it—danger. . . . It's nothing!"

He spoke quite differently to Marusya.

"I don't know, Princess, but in my opinion . . . everybody has his own opinion, Princess. In my opinion, his Excellency . . . Pff! . . . *schwach*, as the Germans say. . . . But it all depends . . . depends, so to speak, on the crisis."

"Is there danger?" Marusya asked in a low voice.

Ivan Adolfovich wrinkled his forehead, and began to prove that everybody had his own opinion. . . . A three rouble note was given to him. He was delighted, confused, coughed and slunk away.

When they had somewhat recovered their composure the Princess and Marusya decided to send for a celebrity. Celebrities were expensive—but what was to be done? The life of a dear one was worth more than money. The man-cook ran for Toporkov, of course he did not find him in. He had to leave a note. Toporkov was not soon in answering the summons. They waited for him anxiously with sinking hearts the whole day, they waited for him the whole night and morning. . . . They even wanted to send for another doctor, and settled to call Toporkov rude, when he did come to tell him he was rude to his very face, so that another time he would not dare to make other people wait for him so long. Notwithstanding their grief the inhabitants of the Princess Priklonsky's house were revolted to the depths of their souls. At last about two o'clock the next day an open carriage drove up to the door. Nikifor tottered hurriedly into the hall and a few seconds later he was most respectfully pulling the cloth overcoat off his nephew's shoulders. With a cough Toporkov announced his arrival and without greeting anybody went straight to the sick man's room. He went through the dancing-hall, the drawing-room, and the dining-foom, he looked at nobody—looking

important—like a general, and his brightly polished boots squeaking so that they were heard in the whole house. His huge figure inspired respect. He was stately, important, portly and devilishly correct just as if he had been carved out of ivory. His gold-rimmed spectacles and his extremely serious and immovable face gave the finishing touches to his proud deportment. By origin he was a plebeian, but he had scarcely anything plebeian about him except his strongly developed muscles. All was aristocratic and gentlemanlike. His face was rosy, handsome, and indeed if one could believe his lady patients, very handsome. His neck was as white as a woman's. His hair was as soft as silk and pretty, but unfortunately cropped short. If Toporkov had paid more attention to his personal appearance he would not have had his hair cropped short, but would have allowed it to grow till it touched his collar. His face was handsome but too cold and too serious to appear agreeable. Cold, serious and too immovable, his face, though handsome, expressed nothing except extreme fatigue from long days of hard work.

Marusya went to meet Toporkov and wringing her hands she began to beg. She had never before begged of anybody.

"Save him, Doctor!" she said raising her large eyes to his face. "I implore you! Our only hope is in you!"

Toporkov passed her and went to Egorushka.

"Open the ventilators!" he ordered when he entered the sick man's room. "Why did you not open the ventilators? How can he breathe?"

The Princess Marusya and Nikifor rushed to the windows and to the stove. In the windows, where the

winter frames had already been put in, there were no ventilators. The stove was not being heated.

"There are no ventilators," the Princess said timidly.

"Strange. . . . Hm. . . . How can one cure under such conditions. I won't treat him!"

And raising his voice slightly Toporkov continued :

"Carry him into the dancing-hall. It's not so stuffy there. Call the servants!"

Nikifor rushed to the bed and took his place at the head. The Princess, blushing that she had no other servants than Nikifor, the man-cook and a half-blind maid, took hold of the feet. Marusya also took hold of the bed and pulled it with all her strength. The infirm old man and the five weak women lifted the bed with groans, and not believing in their strength, stumbling and fearing to drop it carried it out of the room. The Princess's dress tore at the shoulder, and something snapped in her stomach, it became green before Marusya's eyes and her arms ached terribly—Egorushka was so heavy! And he, the doctor of medicine, Toporkov strode along importantly after the bed, frowning that his time was being wasted by such trifles. He did not even raise a finger to help the ladies! What a brute!

The bed was placed next to the piano. Toporkov threw off the blanket, and while questioning the Princess he began to undress Egorushka, who was tossing about. His night shirt was taken off in a second.

"I beg you to be brief! That has nothing to do with the case!" Toporkov snapped while he listened to the Princess. "Unnecessary people can go away."

Having rapped with a little hammer on Egorushka's chest he turned the patient over on his stomach and

began rapping again listening and sniffing (doctors always sniff while auscultating) and he pronounced it to be a simple attack of delirium tremens.

"It would not be a bad thing to put him into a straight-jacket," he said in his smooth voice pronouncing each word in a staccato.

Having given a few more instructions he wrote a recipe and hastened to the door. When he was writing the recipe he asked among other things Egorushka's family name.

"Prince Priklonsky," the Princess said.

"Priklonsky?" Toporkov asked again.

"How soon you have forgotten the family name of your former landowners," the Princess thought.

The word "Masters" the Princess did not dare to think: the figure of the former serf was too imposing.

In the lobby she came up to him and asked with a sinking heart:

"Doctor, is he in danger?"

"I think not."

"In your opinion he will recover."

"I suppose so," the doctor answered coldly and, nodding his head slightly, he went down the stairs to his horses which were as stately and important as he was.

After the doctor's departure the Princess and Marusya breathed freely for the first time after twenty-four hours of anguish. The celebrated Toporkov had given them hopes.

"How attentive he is, how kind!" the Princess said, blessing all the doctors in the world in her heart.

Mothers love medicine and have trust in it when their children are ill!

"An im-im-portant gentleman!" remarked Nikifor,

who for many long days had seen nobody in the master's house but Egorushka's profligate boon-companions.

The old man never dreamed that this important gentleman was no other than the dirty Kol'ka, whom, in the good old times, he had often had to pull out from under the water-carrier's cart and whip.

The Princess had concealed from him that his nephew was a doctor.

That evening, at sunset, Marusya, worn out with grief and fatigue, had a severe shivering fit, which forced her to go to bed. The shivering fit was followed by high fever and pain in the side. All night she was delirious and moaned :

*"Maman, I am dying!"*

Toporkov, who arrived before ten the next morning, had to attend on two patients instead of one : both Prince Egorushka and Marusya. He found that Marusya had pneumonia.

There was an odour of death in the house of the Princess Priklonsky. Unseen but terrible he hovered over the two beds threatening at every moment to deprive the old Princess of both her children. The Princess was distraught with despair.

"I don't know!" Toporkov said to her. "I can't know, Madam, I am no prophet. It will be clear in a few days."

He said these words dryly, coldly, and they pierced the unhappy woman's heart. Had there been but one word of hope! To complete her misery, Toporkov prescribed scarcely any medicine for the patients, but contented himself solely with tapping them, listening to their breathing, and making reprimands that the air was not pure, that the fomentations were applied to the wrong place and made at the wrong time.

And the old lady considered all these new fangled things as trifles that could have no good results. Day and night she wandered without ceasing from one bed to the other, forgetful of everything else in the world ; making vows and praying.

Fevers and pneumonia she considered the most fatal diseases and, when there was a little blood in Marusya's expectorations, the old lady imagined that her daughter was in the last stages of consumption "and she fell down in a swoon."

You can imagine her happiness when on the seventh day of her illness Marusya smiled and said :

"I am well."

On the seventh day Egorushka also recovered his senses. Praying as to a demi-God, laughing and crying with happiness, the Princess went up to Toporkov, who had just arrived and said :

"Doctor, I owe the saving of my children to you. I thank you !"

"What, Madam ? "

"I owe you much ! You have saved my children ! "

"Ah . . . The Seventh day ! I expected it to be on the fifth. However, that's all one. Give this powder night and morning. Continue the fomentations. This heavy blanket can be replaced by a lighter one. Give your son sour drinks. I shall look in to-morrow evening."

The celebrity nodded and descended the stairs with the measured stride of a general.

## II

THE day is fine, clear and slightly frosty, one of those autumn days on which you are gladly reconciled to

the cold and damp and your heavy galoshes. The air is so clear that you can see quite distinctly the beak of the jack-daw perched on the top of the very highest belfry ; the air is filled with the odour of autumn. When you go out into the street your checks become suffused with a healthy rosy hue that resembles the colour of a good Crimean apple. The yellow leaves that have fallen long since are patiently awaiting the first snow, and when trampled under foot look golden in the sunlight, and emit rays like ducats. Nature goes to rest quietly and calmly, without wind or a sound. Immovable and dumb, as if tired out by the winter and summer she is taking her ease in the caressing and warm rays of the sun, and looking at this beginning of rest you also want to be at ease.

On such a day Marusya and Egorushka were sitting near the window awaiting Toporkov, who was coming for the last time. Warming, caressing light was shed into the Priklonsky's window ; it played on the carpets, the chairs, and the piano. This light poured upon everything. Marusya and Egorushka looked out of the window into the street and celebrated their recovery.

Convalescents, especially when they are young, are always very happy. They feel and understand health, a thing that ordinary people in good health, neither feel, nor understand. Health is freedom, and who except freed men can enjoy the sense of freedom ? Every minute Marusya and Egorushka felt that they were freed. How happy they were ! They wanted to breathe, to look out of the window, to move, in a word—to live, all these desires were satisfied every second : Furov who protested their bills, gossip, Egorushka's conduct, poverty—all were forgotten.

Only pleasant things were not forgotten, things that did not agitate : fine weather, the balls that were to take place, kind *Maman* and—the Doctor. Marusya laughed and talked without ceasing. The chief subject of her conversation was the doctor, who was expected at any moment.

"A wonderful man, an all-powerful man!" she said. "How all-powerful his art is! George, only consider, what a great deed it is to combat with nature and to conquer!"

She talked on energetically placing a larger note of exclamation after every high-sounding phrase, which, however, was uttered with all sincerity.

Egorushka listened to his sister's enraptured utterances and blinked in acquiescence. He too honoured Toporkov's stern face and he was convinced that this recovery was solely due to the Doctor. *Maman* sat near them beaming, rejoicing and sharing her children's delight.

She admired, not only Toporkov's skill in curing, but also the "positiveness" which she had been able to read in the Doctor's face.

"It is only a pity that he is—that he is of such a low origin," the Princess said, and looked timidly at her daughter. "And his trade—is not a specially clean one. He is always poking about in all sorts of things. . . . Fie!"

Marusya coloured up and sat down in another arm-chair, farther away from her mother. Egorushka was also vexed.

He could not bear aristocratic pride and giving oneself airs. Poverty is a good teacher! He had often had to experience the airs of people who were richer than himself.

"In our day, *Mutter*," he said disdainfully shrugging his shoulders, "he who has a good head on his shoulders, and a big pocket in his trousers, is of good origin, but he who instead of a head has the seat of the human body, and instead of a pocket a soap-bubble is counted as naught, that is all."

When he said this Egorushka was only mimicking. Two months before he had heard the very same words from a seminarist with whom he was having a game of billiards.

"I would gladly exchange my princely title for his head and his pocket," Egorushka added.

Marusya, lifted her eyes full of gratitude to her brother.

"I would like to say much to you, *Maman*, but you would not understand me," she said with a sigh. "Nothing will convert you. . . . It's a great pity."

The Princess, convicted of old-fashioned ideas, became confused and began to justify herself.

"It is true, I knew a doctor in Petersburg who was a Baron," she said. "Yes, yes, and abroad too. . . . That is true. . . . Culture is of great importance, certainly. . . . Oh yes. . . ."

Toporkov arrived shortly after twelve. He entered the room as he had done the first time, looking important and not taking notice of anybody.

"Don't drink spirituous liquors, and avoid as much as possible all excesses," he said to Egorushka as he put down his hat. "You must take care of your liver which is considerably enlarged already. The enlargement can entirely be ascribed to the use of spirituous liquors. Drink the waters as prescribed."

And then turning to Marusya he gave her also some parting advice.

Marusya listened to him with attention, as if it were some interesting sale, looking straight into the eyes of the learned man.

" Well ! I think you have understood ? " Toporkov asked.

" Ah, yes ? *Merci.*"

The visit had lasted exactly four minutes.

Toporkov coughed, took up his hat and nodded. Marusya and Egorushka stared at their mother. Marusya even blushed.

The Princess waddling like a duck, and getting very red, went up to the doctor and thrust her hand into his white fist awkwardly.

" Permit me to thank you," she said.

Egorushka and Marusya cast down their eyes. Toporkov lifted his fist to his spectacles and looked at the packet. Without becoming confused, and without lowering his eyes he wetted his finger in his mouth and began counting the bank-notes in a scarcely audible voice. He counted twelve twenty-five rouble notes. It was not without an object that the day before Nikifor had been running about with her bracelets and ear-rings. A light like the halo in paintings of saints, passed over Toporkov's face, his face was drawn in a sort of smile. He evidently was quite satisfied with his fee. After having counted the money he put it in his pocket and nodding again he turned to the door.

The Princess, Marusya, and Egorushka stared at the doctor's back and all three felt a sinking of the heart. Their eyes were lighted up by a good feeling ; this man was going away and would not come again, and they were already used to his measured steps, his abrupt words and his serious face.

A little idea arose in the mother's mind. She

suddenly wanted to show favour to this wooden man.

"He's an orphan, poor fellow," she thought. "So solitary!"

"Doctor," she said in her soft old woman's voice.

The Doctor looked round.

"What, Madam?"

"Won't you have a cup of coffee with us? Have the goodness!"

Toporkov frowned, took his watch slowly out of his pocket. He looked at it and after a moment's reflection he said :

"I'll have a glass of tea."

"Please sit down, there."

Toporkov put his hat down and took a seat. He sat down like a lay figure whose knees had been bent and whose neck and shoulders had just been arranged. The Princess and Marusya began to bustle about. Marusya's eyes grew large and troubled, just as if she had been given an insoluble problem. Nikifor in a well-worn black tailcoat and grey gloves began running about the whole house. In every corner of the house there was the clatter of tea things and you could hear the tinkle of tea cups. For some reason Egorushka was called out of the room for a minute, he was summoned in a whisper quietly and mysteriously.

Toporkov waited about ten minutes for the tea. He sat and looked at the pedal of the grand piano, without moving a limb or uttering a sound. At last the door of the drawing-room opened. Beaming, Nikifor appeared carrying a large tray. On the tray there were two glasses of tea in silver holders : one was for the Doctor, the other for Egorushka. Around the glasses arranged in strictly symmetrical order there were cream jugs with raw and boiled cream, sugar

with sugar-tongs, rounds of lemon with a little fork and a dish of biscuits.

Nikifor was followed by Egorushka with a countenance that was dull with importance.

The procession was closed by the Princess with a perspiring forehead and Marusya with large eyes.

"Please have some tea!" the Princess said to Toporkov.

Egorushka took a glass, went to one side and began carefully to sip it. Toporkov took a glass and also began to sip the tea. The Princess and Marusya sat down at the side and examined the Doctor's face.

"Perhaps it is not sweet enough?" the Princess asked.

"No, it is quite sweet enough."

And as might have been expected this was followed by a silence—a painful, an unpleasant silence, during which one feels terribly awkward and embarrassed. The Doctor drank and was silent. It was evident that he ignored his surroundings, and saw nothing before him but his tea.

The Princess and Marusya wanted terribly to converse with this clever man, but did not know how to begin: they both were afraid of appearing silly. Egorushka looked at the Doctor and his eyes showed that he wanted to ask something, but did not know how to begin. The silence of the grave reigned around only broken from time to time by the sound of swallowing. Toporkov swallowed very loudly. It was evident he was in no way confused and drank as he liked to. When he swallowed he emitted noises that resembled the sound of "gly." Each sip seemed to fall out of his mouth into a sort of abyss and to splash there against something large and smooth. Nikifor

also broke the silence occasionally. He smacked his lips and chewed the whole time just as if he were tasting their guest, the Doctor.

"Is it true as people say, that it is a bad thing to smoke?" Egorushka ventured to ask at last.

"Nicotine, the alkaloid of tobacco acts on the system like one of the strongest poisons. The poison that is introduced into the system from every cigarette is of an insignificant quantity, but this introduction is continuous. The quantity of poison, as well as its energy, is in an inverse ratio to the duration of its consumption."

The Princess and Marusya looked at each other: "how clever he is!" their glances said. Egorushka began to blink and drew out his fish-like face. Poor fellow, he did not understand the Doctor.

"We had in our regiment," he began wishing to change this learned conversation into a more ordinary one, "an officer, a certain Koshechkin, a very good sort of fellow. He was awfully like you. Awfully. As like as two drops of water! It would be impossible to know one from the other! Was he a relation of yours?"

Instead of an answer the Doctor uttered a loud swallowing sound, and the corners of his lips were raised and wrinkled in a contemptuous smile. It was evident he despised Egorushka.

"Please tell me, Doctor, have I quite recovered?" Marusya asked. "Can I reckon on a complete recovery?"

"I trust you can. I reckon on a complete recovery on the basis . . ."

And the Doctor, holding his head high and looking straight at Marusya, began to explain the issues of

pneumonia. He spoke in measured tones, pronouncing each word distinctly, neither raising nor allowing his voice to sink. He was listened to with more than delight, but unfortunately this cold man did not know how to popularize his subject, nor did he think it necessary to adapt himself to other's brains. In his discourse he employed several times the words "abscess," "clots," "regeneration" and in general he spoke exceedingly well and beautifully, but in a very incomprehensible manner. He gave them quite a lecture, but he did not say a single sentence that his hearers could understand. However this did not prevent them from sitting open-mouthed, gazing almost with veneration at the learned man. Marusya could not take her eyes off his lips and she caught each word. She looked at him and compared his face with the faces she saw around her every day. How unlike this learned, weary, face, were the dull tipsy faces of Egorushka's friends, who paid court to her and annoyed her every day by their visits. The faces of those rakes and libertines, from whom Marusya had never heard a single kind and honest word, and who were unworthy to be the soles of this cold, passionless, clever and arrogant man's boots.

"What a beautiful face!" Marusya thought charmed by his face, his voice, his words. "What cleverness and what learning! Why is George military? He ought to have been a scientific man."

Egorushka looked at the Doctor with emotion and thought :

"If he talks about clever things, it's clear he thinks us clever. It's a good thing we have taken up such a position in society. It was very stupid of me, however, to tell all those lies about Koshechkin."

When the Doctor had finished his lecture, his hearers drew a long breath, just as if they had accomplished some great deed.

"How nice it is to know everything!" the Princess sighed.

Marusya rose, and as if she wanted to thank the Doctor for his lecture, she sat down at the piano and struck the keys. She wanted very much to engage the Doctor in conversation, to draw him in deeper, more feelingly, and music always leads to conversation; she also wanted to show off her capabilities before this clever and understanding man.

"That is by Chopin," the Princess said, smiling languidly and holding her hands like an Institute\* girl. "A charming piece! Doctor, I can also boast that she's an excellent singer. My pupil. In former days I was the possessor of a splendid voice. And there's also . . ." The Princess mentioned the name of a celebrated Russian singer. "You know her of course? She also owes much to me. . . . Yes, Sir. . . . I gave her lessons. She was a charming girl. She was a sort of relation of my deceased Prince. . . . Do you like singing? But why do I ask? Who does not like singing?"

Marusya began to play the best part of the waltz and turned round with a smile. She wanted to read on the Doctor's face what impression her playing had made on him.

But she was unable to read anything on it. The Doctor's face was as cold and unexpressive as before. He hastened to finish his tea.

"I love that passage," Marusya said.

\* Government schools where the daughters of military men and government officials were educated at the charge of the State.

"Thank you," the Doctor said. "I do not want any more."

He swallowed the last drop, rose and took up his hat, without expressing the slightest wish to hear the waltz to the end. The Princess jumped up. Marusya became confused and feeling offended she closed the piano.

"Are you already going away?" the Princess said frowning. "Is there nothing I can offer you? I hope, Doctor. . . . You know the way now. Look in some evening. . . . Do not forget us. . . .

The Doctor nodded twice, pressed the hand of the Princess stretched out to him awkwardly and silently went to his fur coat.

"Ice! Wood!" The Princess exclaimed when the Doctor had left the room. "It is terrible! He does not know how to laugh, a perfect log! It was useless to play to him, Marie. He seems only to have remained for the tea! He drank it and went away."

"But how clever he is, *maman*! So clever! With whom could he speak in our house? I am ignorant, George is reserved and silent. . . . Are we able to carry on a clever conversation? No!"

"There's a plebeian for you! There you have Nikifor's nephew!" Egorushka said as he drank the remains of the cream out of the cream jugs. "What do you think of him? Rational, indifferent, subjective. . . . The rogue, scatters them about! What sort of a plebeian is that? And what a turn-out he has! Look! What chic!"

All three looking out of the window watched the celebrity sit down in his open carriage and wrap himself up in his large bearskin fur coat. The Princess blushed with vexation and Egorushka winked know-

ingly and began to whistle. Marusya did not see the open carriage. She had no time to see it : she could only look at the Doctor, who had made a great impression on her. On whom has a novelty no effect?

For Marusya Toporkov was too new . . .

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The first snow had fallen, it was followed by the second and the third and the long winter had begun with its hard frosts, its snow-drifts, and its icicles. I don't like winter and I don't believe people who say they do. It is cold out of doors, smoky in the rooms, damp in the galoshes. Either as severe as a mother-in-law, or as tearful as an old maid, winter with its enchanting moonlit nights, its troikas, shooting-parties, concerts, and balls, soon palls and it lasts too long not to poison more than one homeless hectic life.

Life took its usual course in the house of the Princess Priklonsky. Egorushka and Marusya had quite recovered and even their mother ceased to consider them invalids. Their affairs, as formerly, did not think of improving. Their finances became always worse and worse and money became more and more scarce. The Princess pawned and re-pawned all her jewels and other valuables belonging to the family or that she herself had acquired. Nikifor as formerly gossiped in the shops where he was sent to buy all sorts of small articles, on credit, and told everybody that his masters owed him three hundred roubles and had no thought of paying him. The man-cook had the same tale to tell and one of the shopkeepers gave him a pair of old boots out of sympathy. Furov became

more insistent. He would hear of no more prolongations and was rude to the Princess when she implored him not to protest her bills. Following Furov's example other creditors became importunate. Every morning the Princess had to receive notaries, process-servers and creditors. And, I believe, an action was taken by the creditors to declare them insolvent.

The Princess's pillow, as formerly, never dried from her tears. During the day the Princess pulled herself together, but at night she gave vent to her tears and wept every night to the very morning. There was no need to look very far to discover the cause of these tears. The causes were under your very nose, they hurt the eyes by their prominence and clearness. Her pride was wounded by poverty at every moment . . . and wounded by whom? By paltry little people, all sorts of Furovs, man-cooks, little tradesmen. The best loved things were sent to the pawnbrokers, the parting from them cut the Princess to the very heart. Marusya was not settled as yet. . . . Were there not many causes for her tears? The future was misty, but even through the mist the Princess could perceive ominous apparitions. There was but little hope in that future. She had no hope in what it might bring, but she feared it. . . .

Money became scarcer and scarcer, but Egorushka became more and more dissipated. This dissipation was persistent and obdurate, it seemed as if he wished to make up for the time he had lost during his illness. He squandered on drink all that he possessed, and what he did not possess, his own and not his own. In his profligacy he was devilishly bold and insolent. He never minded borrowing money from the first person he met. To sit down to play cards without having a

groat in his pocket was his constant habit, to feast and drink at the charge of another, or to swagger about in another man's carriage and never tip the driver he did not consider a sin. He was very little changed : formerly he used to get angry when he was laughed at, now he only became slightly confused when he was led or turned out.

Only Marusya was changed. For her there was a novelty and a novelty of the most terrible nature. She began to be disenchanted of her brother. For some reason she suddenly began to feel, that her brother was not a misunderstood, an unappreciated man, that he was simply quite an ordinary man, a man like all the others, even somewhat worse . . . she ceased to believe in his hopeless love. It was a terrible novelty. Sitting for whole hours at the window, looking without an object into the street, she tried to conjure in her mind her brother's face, and endeavoured to read in it something noble, that would not allow of disenchantment; but she was able to read in this expressionless face nothing except "frivolous man ! Worthless man !" Next to this face there arose the faces of his friends, their guests, the old consoling ladies, her suitors, and the tearful, careworn face of the Princess—and grief made poor Marusya's heart ache. How mean, colourless and dull, how stupid, tiresome and lazy life was near these folk who were relations and loved but quite insignificant people !

Her heart sank with melancholy, and her breath was taken away by one terrible, heretical wish. . . . There were moments when she had a passionate longing to run away, but where to ? Of course to a place where people did not tremble at the thoughts of poverty, were not licentious, but worked, and did

not converse for whole days with silly old women, and drunken fools. In Marusya's imagination there was imprinted only one respectable, sensible face : she read in this face cleverness, great learning and weariness, This face she could not forget. She saw it every day, and in the happiest conditons, just when its owner was working, or appeared to be working.

Every day Doctor Toporkov drove past the Priklonsky's house in his luxurious sledge with its bear-skin cover and stout coachman. He had very many patients, whom he visited from early morning to late night, and during the day he had time to drive through all the streets and lanes. He sat in his sledge as he sat in an arm-chair : gravely, holding his head and shoulders straight, and without looking to either side. Nothing was seen of his face, above the thick collar of his bear-skin fur coat, but his smooth white forehead and his gold spectacles : even that was enough for Marusya. She imagined that cold, proud, scornful rays were cast through his spectacles by this benefactor of humanity.

"This man has a right to be scornful !" she thought "He is wise! . . . But what a luxurious sledge, what splendid horses ! And he was formerly a serf ! How strong a man must be to have been born a lackey and to have become as he has—unapproachable !"

Only Marusya remembered the Doctor, all the others were beginning to forget him, and would soon have forgotten him quite, if he had not reminded them of himself. He reminded them of himself too feelingly.

At mid-day on the day after Christmas, when the whole of the Priklonsky family were at home there was a timid ring of the hall bell, and Nikifor opened the door.

"Is the Princessie at ho-o-ome?" an old woman's voice was heard to ask in the hall, and not waiting for an answer, a little old woman crept into the drawing-room. "How do you do, Princessie, your Excellency . . . benefactress. How is your Excellency's health?"

"What do you want?" the Princess asked looking with curiosity at the old woman.

Egorushka burst out laughing behind his hand. The old woman's head seemed to him to be like an over-ripe melon with an up-turned tail.

"Matushka, don't you recognise me? Is it possible you don't remember? Have you forgotten Prokhorovna? I delivered you of your little Prince!"

The old woman crept up to Egorushka and gave him a smacking kiss on the breast and on the hand.

"I don't understand," Egorushka grumbled angrily wiping his coat and his hand. "That old devil Nikifor lets in all sorts of rubb . . ."

"What do you want?" the Princess repeated and it appeared to her that the old woman smelled very strongly of olive oil.

The old woman seated herself in an arm-chair and after a long preface smiling and coquetting (match makers always coquet) she said that the Princess had goods, and that she, the old woman, had a merchant. Marusya blushed scarlet. Egorushka snorted and being interested came nearer to the old woman.

"Strange," the Princess said, "so you have come to arrange a match? I congratulate you Marie, you have a suitor. Who is he? May one know?"

The old woman began to puff, thrust her hand into her breast and pulled out a red cotton handkerchief. Having untied the knots she shook it over the table and a photograph fell out together with a thimble.

'All turned up their noses : the red handkerchief with yellow flowers exhaled a strong odour of snuff.

The Princess took up the photograph and raised it lazily towards her eyes.

"Isn't he handsome, matushka ! " and the old woman began to extol the owner of the portrait. " He is rich, well-born ! . . . An excellent man, sober. . . . "

The Princess blushed and handed the photograph to Marusya, who grew pale.

"Strange," exclaimed the Princess. " If the Doctor wished it I think, he might himself. . . . Mediation is wanted here least of all ! An educated man and suddenly. . . . Did he send you ? He, himself ? "

"He, himself. You have pleased him awfully. Such a good family ! "

Marusya suddenly shrieked and pressing the photograph in her hand she rushed out of the drawing-room precipitately.

"Strange," the Princess continued. " Astonishing—I don't know what to say to you. I never expected this from the Doctor. Why did you trouble to come ? He might himself have come. It's even insulting. For whom does he take us ? We are not a sort of tradespeople. . . . Even tradesmen live differently now."

"A type ! " Egorushka mumbled, looking with disdain at the old woman's head.

The retired Hussar would have given much if he could have administered a fillip to the old girl's head. He did not like old women, in the same way that a big dog does not like cats, and he was seized with quite dog-like delight when he saw a head that looked like a melon.

"Well matushka ? " the matchmaker said with a

sigh. "Although he is not of princely rank I can say matushka—Princessie. . . . You are our benefactress. Oh, sins, sins ! Pray, is he not noble ? And what an education he has received, and he's rich, and the Lord has accorded him all sorts of luxury, Tsaritsa of Heaven ! . . . But if you wish him to come to you, he is quite willing. . . . He'll come with pleasure. Why should he not come ? He can come."

And taking the Princess by the shoulders the old woman drew her towards herself and whispered into her ear.

"He asks sixty thousand. It's a natural thing ! A wife's a wife, but money's money. You yourself are pleased to know that. "I won't take a wife without money ! he says, because as my wife she must enjoy every pleasure. She must have her own capital."

The Princess became purple and her heavy dress rustled as she rose from her arm-chair.

"Have the goodness to tell the Doctor that we are extremely astonished," she said. "Offended. It is impossible that way. There is nothing more I can say to you. . . . George, why are you so silent ? Let her go away ! Everybody's patience has a limit."

When the match-maker had left the Princess seized her head in her hands, sank down on the sofa and moaned :

"That is to what we have come !" she said. "My God ! Any sort of quack, trash, or yesterday's lackey can make us proposals. Noble ! Ha-ha ! Please tell me where is the nobility there ! He sends a match-maker ! If your father were only alive ! He would not have left it so ! A vulgar fool ! A serf ! "

The Princess was not so much offended that a plebeian dared to woo her daughter, as that he asked

for sixty thousand roubles, which she did not possess. She was wounded by the slightest hint of her poverty. She talked about it until late that evening, and she woke twice in the night to weep.

Nobody was so much impressed by the match-maker's visit as Marusya was. The poor girl was thrown into high fever. Trembling in every limb she threw herself on her bed, hid her flaming face under the pillow and tried with all her might to settle the question :

“ Is it possible ? ”

It was a head-splitting question. Marusya did not know how to answer it for herself. The question expressed her astonishment, and confusion, her secret happiness, which, however, for some reason, she was even ashamed to confess to herself, and which she wanted to conceal from herself.

“ Is it possible ? ” He . . . Toporkov. It cannot be ! It is something, different ! ” The old woman must have lied ! ”

And at the same time thoughts, the sweetest, most secret and enchanting thoughts, which cause the heart to sink and the head to burn, swarmed in her brain, and the whole of her little body was possessed by an unaccountable rapture. He, Toporkov, wanted to make her his wife, but he was so stately, so handsome, so clever ! He had devoted his life to humanity and . . . he drives about in such a luxurious sledge !

“ Is it possible ? ” He can be loved ! Marusya decided in the evening. O, I am willing. I am free from every kind of prejudice, and will follow this serf to the end of the world ! If my mother says a single word, I will leave her ! I am willing ! ”

Other questions, second-rate, or third-rate questions

she had no time to settle. They did not matter to her. What had the match-maker to do with it? Why did he, and when did he fall in love with her? Why did he not come, if he loved her? What had she to do with these, and with many other questions? She was astonished, surprised—happy and that was enough for her.

"I am willing!" she whispered, trying to conjure up in her imagination his face, with the gold rimmed spectacles, through which intelligent, grave, tired eyes looked out—"Let him come! I am willing."

While Marusya was tossing about on her bed in this way, feeling how her happiness consumed her whole body, the match-maker was going about the houses of merchants scattering with a lavish hand, the Doctor's portraits. Going from one rich house to another she searched for "goods" that she might recommend to the "noble" merchant. Toporkov had not sent her specially to the Priklonskies. He had told her to go "wherever she liked." He was indifferent to his marriage, which, however, he felt to be a necessity; and it was quite the same to him where the match-maker went. He required sixty thousand roubles. Sixty thousand roubles and no less. The house he wanted to buy would not be sold to him for less than that sum. There was nobody from whom he could borrow it, and the owner would not accept payment by instalments. Only one thing remained: he must marry for money, and that was just what he intended to do, so that, by God, Marusya was in no way the cause of his desire to get entangled in Hyman's meshes!

At nearly one o'clock at night Egorushka came quietly into Marusya's bedroom. Marusya was

undressed and trying to sleep. She was fatigued by her unexpected happiness. She wanted, by some means or other, to quiet her palpitating heart, which she thought throbbed so loudly, that it might be heard all over the house. In each wrinkle of Egorushka's face a thousand secrets were hidden. He coughed in a mysterious way, looked at Marusya meaningly, and as if wishing to communicate something terribly important to her he sat down on her legs and bent slightly towards her ear.

"Do you know what I'll tell you, Masha?" he began quietly. "I speak quite frankly. . . . My opinion is this. Because I am thinking of your happiness. Are you asleep? I am thinking of your happiness: marry that—marry Toporkov! Don't give yourself airs, marry him—and have done with it! He's a man in every way—and he's rich. It does not matter that he is of low birth. Hang it all!"

Marusya closed her eyes tighter. She was ashamed. At the same time, she was pleased that her brother sympathized with Toporkov.

"Besides he is rich! At least you won't starve. While if you wait for a Prince or a Count you might easily die of hunger. We haven't a copeck! Phew! All's empty! Why, you're surely asleep? Eh? Silence is a sign of consent."

Marusya smiled. Egorushka smiled and kissed her hand for the first time in his life.

"Marry him. . . . He's an educated man. How comfortable we shall be! The old girl will cease wailing!"

And Egorushka remained, for a short time immersed in thought, then he shook his head and said:

"Only one thing I can't understand. Why the

devil did he send that match-maker? Why did he not come himself? There's something wrong here! He's not the sort of man to send a match-maker."

"That's true," thought Marusya and for some reason she shivered. "There's something wrong here! . . . It was stupid to send a match-maker. Yes; indeed, what can it mean?"

Egorushka who usually did not possess the faculty of deliberation had deliberated this time.

"Of course he has no time to loaf about. He's busy all day long. He rushes about from one patient to another, like a madman."

Marusya was reassured, but not for long. Egoruska was silent for a short time and then he said :

"There's another thing I can't understand ; he ordered that old witch to say, that the dowry must be not less than sixty thousand roubles. Do you hear? Otherwise, he said it's impossible."

Marusya suddenly opened her eyes, a shiver passed over her whole body, she sprang to a sitting posture, even forgetting to cover her shoulders with the blanket. Her eyes flashed and her cheeks flamed up.

"Did the old woman say that?" she asked pulling Egorushka's arm. "Tell her she lies! Such people, that is people like him . . . can't have said that. He and . . . money! Ha! Ha! Such baseness can only be suspected by people, who do not know how proud he is, how honest, how uncovetous he is! Yes! He is a most excellent man! They don't want to understand him!"

"I also think so," Egorushka said. "The old woman lied. She probably wanted to do him a service. She's used to it among the tradespeople!"

Marusya's head nodded in confirmation as she

slipped under her blanket. Egorushka rose and stretched himself.

"Mother is howling," he said, "but we won't pay attention to her. Well, then it will be yes? You're willing? Excellent! There's no reason to give oneself airs. Mrs. Doctor! Ha, ha! Mrs. Doctor!"

Egorushka patted the soles of Marusya's feet, and feeling very satisfied he left her room. As he went to bed he made out, in his mind, a long list of guests he would invite to the wedding.

"The champagne must be got from Aboltukhov," he thought as he fell asleep. "The hors d'œuvres must be taken at Korchatov's, he has good fresh caviar. Well, and the lobsters. . . ."

The next morning Marusya dressed simply, but with refinement, and not without coquettishness sat down at the window and waited. At about eleven Toporkov flew past, but did not come in. In the afternoon he flew past again with his fine black horses, just under the windows, but he again did not come in, nor did he even look up at the window near which Marusya was sitting with a pink ribbon in her hair.

"He has no time," Marusya thought and admired him. "He will come on Sunday. . . ."

But he did not come on Sunday. And for a whole month he did not come, nor for two nor for three months either. Of course he never thought of the Priklonskies, but Marusya waited for him and grew thin from waiting. . . . Cats, not ordinary cats, but cats with long yellow claws scratched at her heart.

"Why does he not come?" she asked herself. "Why? Ah, I know. He is offended because. . . . At what is he offended? Because Mother treated the old

match-maker with so little delicacy. Now he thinks I cannot love him. . . . ”

“ Br-r-rute ! ” growled Egorushka who had already gone to Aboltukhov’s several times to ask him if he could write for champagne of the highest grade.

After Easter, which fell that year at the end of March, Marusya ceased waiting.

One day Egorushka came into her bedroom, laughing sardonically and informed her that her suitor had married a merchant’s daughter.

“ I have the honour to congratulate you miss ! I have the honour ! Ha-ha-ha ! ”

This news treated my little heroine too cruelly.

She lost courage, and not for a day, but for whole months she went about as the personification of grief and despair. She tore the pink ribbon out of her hair and began to hate life. But how infatuated and unjust feelings are. Even this act Marusya could excuse in him. It was not for nothing, that she had read so many novels in which people got married to spite those they loved ; to spite, to pique, to wound them !

“ He got married to this fool to spite me,” Marusya thought. “ Oh, how badly we acted to treat his addressess so offensively ! People like him do not forget offences ! ”

The healthy colour disappeared from her cheeks, her lips forgot how to form into a smile, her brain refused to think of the future—Marusya began to get foolish. She imagined that with Toporkov her object in life had been lost. Why should she live now, when for her share there only remained blockheads, parasites, and debauchees ! She became a hypochondriac. She noticed nothing, she paid attention to nothing,

she listened to nothing, she dragged on the dull, colourless life for which our girls both old and young are so well qualified. She took no notice of her suitors who were numerous, among her relations and acquaintances. She looked upon their own bad circumstances with indifference and apathy. She did not notice when the bank sold the house of the Princess Priklonskies, with all its historical, and family household goods, nor that they were obliged to move into a new, modest and cheap flat of the middle class type. It was only a long, hard dream, but not without apparitions for her. She dreamed about Toporkov in every phase: seated in his sledge, in his fur coat, without his fur coat, sitting, or walking majestically. Her whole life consisted of a dream.

The thunder rumbled—and the dream fell from the blue eyes with their flaxen lashes. . . . The Princess-mother, unable to support their ruin, fell ill in their new flat and died, leaving nothing to her children but her blessing and a few dresses. Her death was a terrible misfortune for the young Princess. The dream disappeared in order to make place for grief.

### III

THE autumn had arrived, the same damp and dirty autumn as it had been the year before.

It was a grey and lugubrious morning. Dark grey clouds, that looked as if they had been smeared with mud, covered the whole sky, and made one feel melancholy by their very immobility. The sun did not appear to exist. During a whole week it had not once looked out on the earth, as if it were afraid to soil its rays with liquid dirt.

Rain drops drummed on the window-panes with special force, the wind moaned in the chimneys, and howled like a dog who has lost its master. Not a face could be seen on which the expression of hopeless dullness was not imprinted.

The most hopeless dullness is better than that impassable sorrow which shone that morning in Marusya's face. Wading her way through the liquid mud my heroine dragged her weary steps towards Doctor Toporkov's house. Why did she go to him?

"I am going to be cured," she thought.

But, reader, don't believe her. There was a reason for the struggle that was to be read on her face.

The Princess came to the Doctor's house and with a sinking heart she pulled the bell timidly. A minute later steps were heard at the other side of the door. Marusya felt that her legs became ice-cold and bent beneath her. The lock of the door clicked and Marusya saw before her the enquiring face of a good looking maid-servant.

"Is the Doctor at home?"

"We don't receive to-day. To-morrow" the maid-servant answered, and shivering from the damp air, that assailed her, she took a step back.

The door was slammed in Marusya's face, it shook and was locked with noise.

The Princess was abashed and lazily wended her way homewards. At home she was awaited by a gratuitous performance, that had long since wearied her. A performance that was far from princely!

In their little drawing-room Prince Egorushka was seated on a sofa that was covered with a smooth new chintz. He was sitting there cross-legged like a Turk. Near him on the floor his friend, Kaleria Ivanovna,

was lying. They were both playing at cards a game called noses and drinking. The Prince was drinking beer, his Dulcenia madeira. The winner received twenty copecks and he had the right to fillip his adversary on the nose. Kaleria Ivanovna, being a lady, had a slight concession made to her : instead of twenty copecks she might pay in kisses. This game caused them both inexpressible delight. They rolled about with laughter, pinched each other, and jumped up from their places every minute and chased each other round the room. Egorushka was childishly enraptured when he was the winner. He was in ecstacies at Kaleria Ivanovna's airs when she paid the kisses she had lost.

Kaleria Ivanovna, a tall thin brunette with terribly dark eyebrows and prominent craw-fish like eyes, came to see Egorushka every day. She arrived at the Priklonsky's flat about ten in the morning, had breakfast, dinner and supper with them, and went away after midnight. Egorushka assured his sister that Kaleria Ivanovna was a singer, that she was a most respectable lady and so on.

" You have only to talk to her!" Egorushka tried to persuade his sister. " She's clever! Terribly clever!"

In my opinion Nikifor was more correct, when he called Kaleria Ivanovna a trollop, and Cavalry Ivanovna. He hated her with his whole soul, and he was furious when he had to serve her. He understood the truth and the instinct of a faithful old servant told him that this woman had no right to be in his master's house. Kaleria Ivanovna was stupid and frivolous, but that did not prevent her from leaving the Priklonsky's every day with a full stomach, with the

winnings she had taken at cards, and with the assurance that they could not live without her. She was only the wife of a billiard-marker, but that did not prevent her from being quite the mistress in the Priklonsky's house. This pig liked to put its legs on the table.\*

Marusya lived on a pension she had received after her father's death. Her father's pension was larger than what a retired general usually received, Marusya's share was a mere trifle. But even this share would have sufficed for them to live in easy circumstances if Egorushka had not had so many caprices.

He neither wanted to work, nor did he know how to work, nor did he want to believe that he was poor, and he got cross when he was made to conform to circumstances and to moderate his whims as much as possible.

"Kaleria Ivanovna does not like veal," he often said to Marusya. "You must have roast chicken for her. The deuce only knows, here you've undertaken the housekeeping and don't know how to manage it ! Mind we don't have that beastly veal to-morrow ! We shall starve that poor woman !"

Marusya tried to oppose his wishes, but to avoid unpleasantness she bought a fowl.

"Why have we no roast to-day ?" Egorushka would sometimes shout.

"Because we had a chicken yesterday," Marusya answered.

But Egorushka understood domestic arithmetic very badly and he did not want to understand anything.

\* The Russian saying " Set a pig at table and it will put its legs on the table " is the equivalent of the English saying " Give a clown an inch, he'll take an ell."

At dinner he insisted on having beer for himself and wine for Kaleria Ivanovna.

"How can a decent dinner be without wine?" he asked Marusya shrugging his shoulders, being astonished at the stupidity of some people. "Nikifor, see that there is wine! It's your duty to look after that! And as for you, Masha, you ought to be ashamed! Surely I can't be expected to look after the housekeeping! I can't understand how you can like to vex me in this way!"

He was a licentious sybarite. And soon Kaleria Ivanovna appeared as his assistant.

"Is there any wine for the Prince?" she would ask when the table was being laid for dinner. "And where is the beer? You must fetch some beer! Princess, give the man the money for beer! Have you any change?"

The Princess said she had change and gave the last she possessed. Egorushka and Kaleria ate and drank and never noticed how Marusya's watch, rings and brooches went to the pawnbrokers one after the other, and how her expensive dresses were sold to the old-clothes man.

They neither heard nor saw with what groans and mumblings old Nikifor opened his little trunk, when Marusya borrowed of him money for the dinner of the following day. These mean and stupid people, the Prince and his sweetheart had nothing to do with all this.

The following morning at a little past nine, Marusya started for Toporkov's house. The door was opened by the same good-looking maid-servant. When she conducted her into the ante-room and took off her coat, the maid sighed and said:

"Young lady, I suppose you know? The Doctor does not take less than five roubles for giving advice. Do you know it?"

"Why did she tell me that!" Marusya thought. How impudent! He, poor man, does not know that he has such impudent servants!"

At that very moment Marusya's heart throbbed: she had only three roubles in her pocket, but surely he would not turn her out for a matter of two roubles.

From the lobby Marusya was shown into the waiting-room, where a number of patients were already sitting. Most of the patients thirsting for recovery were, of course, ladies. They occupied all the seats in the room, and were seated in groups conversing. The conversations were most animated about everything and everybody: about the weather, about diseases, about the doctor, about children. They all talked loud and laughed as if they had been at home. Some while waiting for their turn knitted, or embroidered. There were no people simply or badly dressed in the waiting-room. Toporkov received in the next room. They went into his room by turns. They entered the room with pale faces, they came away from him red and perspiring as after confession, as if they had cast from them an unbearable load, and had become happy. Toporkov was occupied with each patient not more than ten minutes. The ailments were probably not very serious.

"How like charlatanism all this is!" Marusya would have thought if she had not been occupied with her own reflections.

Marusya was the last to go into the doctor's receiving room. When she entered that room, full of books with German and French inscriptions on the bindings,

she trembled like a hen which had been dipped into cold water. He was standing in the middle of the room with his left hand resting on the writing table.

How handsome he is was the first thought that flashed through his patient's mind.

Toporkov never tried to show off, and it is probable that he did not know how to show off, but all the poses he took always came out most majestically. The position in which Marusya found him resembled the pose of those majestic models from whom artists painted great commanders. Near the hand that was resting on the table lay a heap of ten and five rouble notes, he had just received from his patients. Near them were lying in strict order all sorts of instruments, machines, and pipes—all exceedingly incomprehensible, exceedingly “learned” for Marusya. This and the study with its luxurious furniture, taken all together, completed the majestic picture. Marusya closed the door and stopped. . . . Toporkov pointed to an arm-chair. My heroine went quietly to the arm-chair and sat down. Toporkov bent forward majestically and sank into another arm-chair opposite her, stared with his enquiring eyes into Marusya's face.

“He has not recognised me!” Marusya thought, “he would otherwise not have remained silent. . . . My God, why is he silent? Well, how am I to begin?”

“Well, Madam? Toporkov roared.

“Cough,” Marusya whispered and as if to confirm her words she coughed twice.

“Since a long time?”

“It's already two months. . . . Mostly at night.”

“Hm . . . Temperature?”

"No I think there is no fever. . . ."

"I think you were once treated by me? What had you before?"

"Pneumonia."

"Hm . . . Yes, I remember. You are Priklonsky I think?"

"Yes . . . My brother was unwell at the same time."

"You will take these powders . . . at night . . . avoid catching cold. . . ."

Toporkov wrote a recipe hastily, and assumed the same pose as before. Marusya rose also.

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing."

Toporkov stared at her. He looked at her and at the door. He was pressed for time and he wanted her to go away. But she continued to stand there, to look at him, to admire him, waiting for him to say something to her. How handsome he was! A minute passed in silence. At last she started, and reading a yawn on his lips and in his eyes expectation, she handed him a three rouble note and turned towards the door. The Doctor threw the money on the table and shut the door after her.

All the way home from the Doctor's Marusya was terribly angry.

"Why did I not speak to him? Why? I'm a coward, that's what I am! How stupid it all turned out. . . . I only troubled him uselessly. Why did I hold that base money in my hand, as if for show? Money—that's such a ticklish thing. . . . God preserve me! It's so easy to offend a man. One must pay, so that it should not be noticed. Well, but why was I silent? He would have told me, he would have

explained. . . . It would have been clear why the match-maker had come. . . . ”

When she reached home Marusya went to bed, and hid her head under the pillow, she always did it when she was excited. But she did not succeed in becoming calm. Egorushka came into her room and began to walk about stamping and making his boots squeak.

There was a look of mystery on his face.

“ What do you want ? ” Marusya asked.

“ Ah-a-a . . . I thought you were asleep, and did not want to disturb you. I only want to communicate something to you—something very pleasant. Kaleria Ivanovna wants to live with us. I have persuaded her.”

“ That can’t be ! *C'est impossible !* Whom did you ask ? ”

“ Why is it impossible ? She is very nice—She’ll help you in the house. We can give her the corner room. . . . ”

“ *Maman* died in the corner room ! It is impossible ! ”

Marusya moved and trembled as if she had been stung. Red spots appeared on her cheeks.

“ It is impossible ! You’ll kill me, George, if you force me to live with that woman. Golubchik ! George, don’t. It’s unnecessary ! My dear ! I implore you ! ”

“ Come now, why does she not please you ? I can’t understand it ? She’s a woman like every other woman. Clever, jolly.”

“ I don’t like her. . . . ”

“ But I love her. I love this woman and I want her to live with me ! ”

Marusya began to cry. . . . Her pale face was disfigured by despair.

"I shall die if she lives here. . . ."

Egorushka began to whistle softly and after pacing about a little longer he left Marusya's room. A minute later he re-entered it.

"Lend me a rouble," he said.

Marusya gave him a rouble. She had to soften Egorushka's sorrow in some way. She imagined that a terrible struggle was going on in his mind between his love for Kaleria and his feeling of duty.

That evening Kaleria came into the Princess's room.

"Why don't you like me?" Kaleria asked putting her arms around the Princess. "I am so unfortunate."

Marusya released herself from this embrace and said :

"I have no reason to like you!"

She had to pay dearly for these words. Kaleria, who, a week later, took up her abode in the room where *Maman* had died, considered it necessary, first of all, to revenge herself for them.

The revenge chosen was exceedingly clumsy.

"Why do you give yourself such airs?" she asked the Princess every day at dinner. "With poverty like yours, you ought not to give yourself airs, but to bow down to kind people. If I had known you had such defects I would never have come to live with you. And why have I fallen in love with your brother?" she added with a sigh.

Reproaches, insinuations, and smiles finished with laughter at Marusya's poverty. Egorushka was indifferent to this laughter. He considered he was indebted to Kaleria and humbled himself. But the idiotic laughter of a billiard-marker's wife and Egorushka's mistress, Marusya's life was poisoned.

For whole evenings Marusya sat in the kitchen,

helpless, weak, undecisive, shedding tears on Nikifor's broad palm. Nikifor whimpered with her and only aggravated Marusya's wounds by reminiscences of the past.

"God will punish them!" he said, trying to comfort her, "and you must not cry."

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During the winter Marusya went again to Toporkov.

When she entered his study he was sitting in an arm-chair as handsome and majestic as before. This time his face bore a look of great weariness. His eyes blinked as they do with a man, who is prevented from sleeping. Without looking at Marusya he pointed with his chin to a chair opposite him. She sat down.

"He has sorrow written on his face," Marusya thought when she looked at him. "He must be very unhappy with that merchant's daughter!"

They sat for a minute in silence. Oh, with what delight she would have complained to him about her life. She wished to disclose to him that which he could not read in any one of his books with French or German inscriptions.

"A cough," she murmured.

The Doctor glanced at her.

"Hm . . . Fever?"

"Yes, in the evening——"

"Do you perspire at night?"

"Yes."

"Undress. . . ."

"That is, how? . . ."

With an impatient movement Toporkov pointed to his chest. Marusya, blushed as she began slowly to unbutton her dress.

"Undress, undress quicker!" said Toporkov and took up a little hammer.

Marusya pulled one arm out of the sleeve. Toporkov came quickly towards her and in the twinkling of an eye, his accustomed hand had lowered her dress to the waist.

"Unbutton your chemise!" and to his patient's great horror he began to tap with his little hammer on her white emaciated breast.

"Let your arms down—don't interfere, I won't eat you," Toporkov growled, and she only blushed and wanted terribly to sink into the earth.

After having tapped her with his hammer Toporkov began the auscultation. The sound at the summit of the left lung was very hollow. A harsh rattle and hardness of breathing could plainly be heard.

"Dress," said Toporkov and he began to question her: was her flat good, did she live a regular life and so on.

"You must go to Samara," he said and he gave her quite a lecture about a regular mode of life. "You will drink Kumiss there. . . . I have finished. You are free. . . ."

Marusya did up her buttons anyhow, handed him five roubles awkwardly, and after having stood looking at him for some time she left the learned man's study.

"He kept me for quite half an hour," she thought as she went home, "and I remained silent! Remained silent! Why did I not talk to him?"

As she went home she did not think of Samara but of Doctor Toporkov. What was the use of Samara to her? It is true Kaleria Ivanovna would not be there, but Toporkov would also not be there.

She did not want Samara, what was Samara to her.

She went along shedding tears, but at the same time triumphing : had he not pronounced her an invalid, and now she could go to him without hesitation as often as she liked, every week if she wanted ! It was so nice in his study, so cosy ! The sofa that stood at the back of the room was specially nice. She would like to sit on that sofa with him and talk about all sorts of things, to complain to him, to advise him not to take so much from poor people. From the rich, of course, he might and even ought to take dear, but he must make a reduction for poor invalids.

"He does not understand life, he cannot distinguish the rich from the poor," Marusya thought. "I could teach him!"

A gratuitous performance awaited her again this time. Egorushka was rolling about on the sofa in a fit of hysterics. He was sobbing and scolding, trembling all the time as if in ague. Tears were streaming down his drunken face.

"Kaleria has gone away !" he wailed. "For two nights she has not slept at home ! She is angry !"

But Egorushka sobbed quite uselessly. In the evening Kaleria returned, she forgave him and took him off to the club with her.

Egorushka's profligacy had now reached its height. . . . Marusya's pension was too little for him and he began to "work". He borrowed money from servants, he cheated at cards, he stole money and things from Marusya. One day when he was walking next to Marusya he stole two roubles out of her pocket ; money she had been saving in order to buy a pair of shoes. He kept one rouble and bought a pair for Kaleria with the other. His friends left him. The former frequenters of the Priklonsky's house, Marusya's

acquaintances now, called him to his face "the illustrious sharper."

Even the girls in the "Château-de-Fleurs" looked with suspicion at him and laughed when he, having borrowed some money from a new acquaintance, invited them to sup with him.

Marusya saw and understood these depths of profligacy.

Kaleria's unceremoniousness also went crescendo.

"Don't rummage in my dresses, please," Marusya said to her one day.

"It will do no harm to your dresses," Kaleria answered, "but if you consider me a thief, then, if you wish it, I can go away."

And Egorushka, cursing his sister lay for a whole week at Kaleria's feet imploring her not to go away.

But such a life could not last for long. Every novel has its end, and this little romance came to an end too.

The carnival week had come, and with it days that foretold the spring was near. The days grew longer, water flowed from the roofs, a fresh air was borne from the fields and when you inhaled it you had a presentiment of spring.

On one of those carnival evenings Nikifor was sitting at Marusya's bed side. Egorushka and Kaleria were not at home.

"I am burning, Nikifor," Marusya said.

But Nikifor only whimpered and only aggravated her wounds by his reminiscences of the past. He talked about the old Prince and the Princess and how they had lived. He described the forests in which the late Prince had shot, the fields where he had hunted hares, Sebastopol! The deceased Prince had been

wounded at Sebastopol. Nikifor had much to tell, Marusya liked best of all when he told her about the estate, that had been sold for debt five years before.

"When one went out on the terrace—the spring was just beginning. Oh, my God ! One did not want to turn one's eyes from God's earth. The forest was still black, but what enjoyment breathed from it ! The river was fine and deep. When she was young, your Mamenka used to catch fish with a rod and line. She would stand there whole days. She loved to be in the air. Nature!"

Nikifor grew hoarse from talking so much. Marusya listened to him, and did not allow him to leave her. She could read on the face of the old footman all that he told her about her father, her mother and about the estate. She listened looking into his face, and she wanted to live, to be happy, to catch fish in the same river in which her mother had fished. . . . That river, beyond the river, fields, beyond the fields dark blue forests, and above all this the sun shines caressingly and warms. It is pleasant to live !

"Golubchik, Nikifor," Marusya murmured pressing his dry hand, "dear Nikifor. Will you borrow five roubles for me to-morrow. It will be the last time. . . . Can you ? "

"I can. . . . I have only five roubles left. Take them miss. God will help us. . . ."

"I shall return them, Golubchik. Borrow them."

The next morning Marusya put on her best dress, tied a pink ribbon in her hair and went to Toporkov's house. Before leaving the house she looked at herself in the glass a dozen times. A new maid met her in Toporkov's ante-room.

"Do you know that the Doctor does not take less

than five roubles for a visit?" the new maid said to Marusya as she helped her off with her coat.

On this occasion the patients were specially numerous. All the seats were occupied. One man was even sitting on the grand piano. The reception of patients began at ten o'clock. At twelve the Doctor had to make an intermission for an operation and resumed his reception at two. Marusya's turn arrived only at four o'clock.

She had not had breakfast, she was tired out with waiting, she was trembling with fever, and she hardly noticed how she found herself in the arm-chair opposite the Doctor. There was a sort of emptiness in her head, her mouth was dry. There was a mist before her eyes. Through the mist she caught only glimpses of things. She had a glimpse of *his* head, a glimpse of *his* hands and *his* little hammer.

"Have you been to Samara?" the doctor asked her.  
"Why did you not go there?"

She did not answer. He tapped all over her chest and ausculated both chest and back. Nearly the whole of the left lung was now affected. A dull sound was also to be heard in the summit of the right lung.

"You need not go to Samara. Don't go away," Toporkov said.

And through the mist Marusya read something like sympathy on his cold serious face.

"I'll not go," she whispered.

"Tell your parents not to let you go out. Avoid all coarse food and anything that is not easily digested."

Toporkov began giving her advice, he was carried away and gave her quite a lecture.

She sat there hearing nothing only looking through

a mist at his moving lips. It appeared to her that he spoke too long. At last he was silent, rose and awaiting her departure fixed his eyes on her.

She did not leave. It pleased her to sit in that comfortable arm-chair, and she feared to go home to Kaleria.

"I have finished," said the doctor, "you are free."

She turned her face towards him and looked at him.

"Don't drive me away!" the Doctor could have read in her eyes if he had been in any way a physiognomist.

Large tears started from her eyes, her arms fell helplessly at the sides of the arm-chair.

"I love you, Doctor," she whispered and a red glow, like the results of a serious conflagration in the soul spread over her face and neck.

"I love you," she whispered a second time, her head shook twice, and then sank feebly down till her forehead touched the table.

And the Doctor? The Doctor—blushed for the first time in the whole course of his practice. His eyes blinked like a boy's who has been ordered to his knees. He had never heard such words from any of his patients, nor in such form. Nor from any other woman! Had not his ears deceived him?

His heart sank and throbbed uneasily. . . . He coughed confusedly.

"Mikolasha!" was called from the next room and two very rosy cheeks of his merchant's daughter appeared at the half-opened door.

The Doctor taking advantage of this summons left the study quickly. He was glad to catch at anything, that could take him out of an awkward position.

After ten minutes when he returned to his study

Marusya was lying on the sofa. She was lying on her back looking upwards. One arm and a tress of her hair were hanging down touching the floor. Marusya was unconscious. Toporkov, red and with a beating heart went up to her and quickly loosened her stays. He broke off a hook and he tore her dress without noticing it : out of every pleat, fold and crevice of her dress fell a shower of *his* recipes, *his* visiting cards, and *his* photographs.

The Doctor splashed some water in her face. . . . She opened her eyes, she raised herself on her elbow and, looking at the Doctor remained plunged in thought. She was interested in the question : "Where am I ? "

"I love you ! " she groaned recognizing the Doctor.

Her eyes full of love and entreaty rested on his face. She looked like an animal that had been wounded by a shot.

"What can I do ? " he asked not knowing how to act.

He asked it in a voice that Marusya did not recognize, not in his measured, staccato tones, but in a soft almost tender voice.

Her elbow gave way and her head sank once more on to the sofa but her eyes continued to gaze at him.

He stood before her and read in her eyes entreaty ; he felt he was in a terrible position. His heart throbbed in his breast and something was going on in his head that had never been before, that was unknown to him. A thousand unasked for recollections swarmed in his heated brain. From where did these recollections come ? Was it possible that they were called up by those eyes full of love and entreaty ?

He remembered his early childhood and how he

had cleaned the master's samovars. After the samovars and the cuffs he had received the memory of his benefactors and his benefactresses in heavy fur cloaks flashed through his brain, this was followed by the church-school where he was sent on account of his "fine voice". The church-school, with its rods and gruel mixed with sand, gave place to the seminary. In the seminary there had been Latin, hunger, thoughts, a love affair with the daughter of the father-steward. He remembered how he had run away from the seminary to the university, contrary to the wishes of his benefactors. He had run away without a groat in his pocket, and in worn-out boots. What charm there was in this flight! In the university he had known cold and hunger for the sake of work. A hard road!

At last he had conquered, he had broken a tunnel to life with his forehead, he had gone through that tunnel and . . . what more? He knows his business admirably, he has read much, he works hard and he is ready to work day and night. . . .

Toporkov glanced at the heap of ten and five rouble-notes that lay on his writing table, he remembered the ladies from whom he had just received this money and he blushed. . . . Was it possible that it was only for five rouble-notes and those ladies he had gone over that hard road? Yes, only for them. . . .

Under the pressure of those recollections his majestic figure seemed to shrink together, his proud stateliness disappeared and wrinkles appeared on his smooth face.

"What can I do?" he murmured a second time as he looked into Marusya'a eyes.

He was ashamed before those eyes.

" What if she were to ask : " What have you done and what have you acquired during the whole of your practice ? "

Five and ten rouble-notes and nothing more. Science, life, peace have all been sacrificed to them. And they have given him a princely habitation, a refined table, horses, in a word, all that is called comfort.

Toporkov remembered the " Ideals " he had had at the seminary and the thoughts he had had at the university, and all these sofas and arm-chairs covered with costly velvet, this floor spread over with carpets, those candelabra and those clocks that had cost three hundred roubles appeared to him terrible dirt that could not be shaken off.

He moved forward and lifted Marusya off the dirt on which she was lying, lifted her, with arms and legs, up high.

" Don't lie here ! " he said and turned away from the sofa.

And as if in gratitude for this a whole cascade of lovely flaxen hair poured over his chest. . . . Close to his gold-rimmed spectacles another's eyes sparkled. And what eyes ! They made one wish to touch them with one's fingers.

" Give me some tea," she whispered.

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The next day Toporkov was seated with her in a first class coupé. He was taking her to the south of France. A strange man ! He knew there was no hope of recovery, he knew it perfectly well, as he knew his own five fingers, yet he was taking her there. . . . The whole way he tapped, auscultated, questioned her.

He did not want to believe science, and with all in his power he tried by tapping and auscultating to extract from her breast the slightest hope.

Money, which but the day before he had collected with such ardour, was now scattered on the way in large quantities.

He would have given everything now if he could only have found that even in one of this girl's lungs he did not hear that accursed rattle! He and she both wanted so badly to live! The sun had risen for them, and they expected the day. . . . But the sun did not save them from gloom and "flowers do not bloom in late autumn."

Princess Marusya died before she had lived three days in southern France.

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When Toporkov returned from France he resumed his former life. He cured ladies and amassed five rouble notes as formerly. However it was possible to notice a change in him. When speaking to women he looked beyond them into space. . . . Because he was afraid when he looked into a woman's face. . . .

Egorushka is alive and well. He has abandoned Kaleria and is now living at Toporkov's. The Doctor took him into his house and is infatuated with him. Egorushka's chin reminds him of Marusya's chin and for that reason he allows Egorushka to squander his five rouble notes.

Egorushka is quite contented.

## SHE LEFT HIM

THEY had finished dinner. In the region of the stomach they had a feeling of a small beatitude; their mouths yawned slightly, their eyes began to grow narrower from sweet drowsiness. The husband lit a cigar, stretched himself and lolled on the couch. The wife sat down at his side and purred. . . . They were both happy.

"Tell me something! . . ." the husband yawned.

"What can I tell you? Hm . . . Oh, yes! Have you heard? Sophie Okurkova has married that . . . what's his name . . . that von Tromb! What a scandal!"

"What's the scandal in it?"

"But Tromb is a scoundrel! He is a blackguard . . . such a dishonest man! He has no principles! A moral monster! He was a count's steward—he grew rich there, now he has a post on the railway and steals. . . . He has robbed his sister. . . . In a word he is a scoundrel and a thief. And she has married such a man? Fancy to live with him? Amazing! Such a moral girl too and . . . there you have it! I would never have got married to such a creature! Not even if he had been a millionaire! I would have turned up my nose at him even if he had been as handsome as—as I don't know what! I can't even imagine having a scoundrel for a husband!"

The wife jumped up and paced about the room red and indignant. Her eyes flashed with anger. Her sincerity was evident.

"This Tromb is such a dreadful creature, and a woman who marries a gentleman like that is stupid and mean a thousand times!"

"So . . . Of course you would not have married him. . . . Hm, yes. . . . Well, and if you were to find out now that I am the same sort of scoundrel? What would you do then?"

"I? I would leave you! I would not remain a single second with you. I can only love an honest man. If I found out that you had done even a hundredth part of what Tromb has done, I . . . would leave at once! It would be good-bye then!"

"So . . . Hm. . . . That's the sort of wife I have! I did not know it. He-he-he! The little woman is lying and does not even blush!"

"I never lie! Try to commit a villainy, then you will see!"

"Why should I try? You yourself know. . . . I am worse than your von Tromb! Tromb is a little pickpocket in comparison. You open your eyes wide? that is strange . . . (a pause). What is my salary?"

"Three thousand a year."

"And what did the necklace, I bought for you a week ago, cost? Two thousand. . . . Is that not so? And yesterday's dress—five hundred. . . . The country villa—two thousand. . . . Ha-ha-ha! Yesterday your papa wheedled a thousand out of me. . . ."

"But, Pierre, there are accessory revenues. . . ."

"Horses. . . . A house doctor. . . . Bills from the milliner. The day before yesterday you lost a hundred roubles at cards. . . ."

The husband sat up and, resting his head on his fists, began to recite a complete indictment. Then

going up to the writing table he showed his wife several material proofs. . . .

"Now my good woman you see that your von Tromb is a mere fiddle-stick, a little pick-pocket when compared with me . . . good-bye—go, and don't condemn people in future."

I have finished. Perhaps the reader will ask :

And did she leave the husband ?

Yes, she went away—into the next room.

## ON A CHRISTMAS EVE

A YOUNG woman of about twenty-three, with a terribly white face was standing on the cliffs above the sea, gazing into the distance. At her little feet, shod with velvet shoes, a narrow rickety stair, with only one shaky hand-rail, led down to the seashore.

The woman was gazing into the distance where, shrouded in profound, impenetrable gloom, space yawned beneath her. Neither the stars, nor the frozen sea which was covered with snow, nor any lights could be seen. Rain was falling in torrents.

"What is out there?" thought the woman as she peered into the distance; and she wrapped her dripping fur coat and shawl more tightly round her body to protect herself from the wind.

Somewhere out there in the impenetrable darkness, at a distance of five or ten versts, or perhaps even farther, her husband, the landowner Litvinov, and his crew of fishermen must be at this moment. If the snow-storm that had raged during the last two days over the sea, had not buried Litvinov and his fishermen under the snow-drifts, he must be hurrying towards the shore at that very time. The sea was rising and people said it would soon begin to break the ice. The ice would not be able to stand such a wind. Would the fishermen's sledges, with their awkward splash-boards, so heavy and difficult of motion, have time to reach the shore before the pale woman hears the roar of the awakening sea?

The woman was terribly anxious to go down the stairs. The wooden rail shook under her hand and, wet and sticky, it slipped out of her grasp like an eel. She sat down on the first step and holding tightly to the dirty cold steps began to descend on all fours. The wind tore at her garments and her fur coat was blown open by it. There was a smell of damp on her breast.

"Holy Miracle-Worker Nikolai, there is no end to this stair!" the young woman whispered as she crept down step by step. The stair-case was exactly six hundred-and-thirty feet high. It had no turns but went sheer down in one line at a sharp angle to the perpendicular. The wind shook it angrily from side to side and it squeaked like a board that is ready to split.

In ten minutes' time the woman had reached the bottom and was standing close to the blue sea. The same darkness was here at the bottom. The wind became fiercer than it had been above. The rain came down in torrents and there seemed to be no end to it.

"Who goes there?" a man's voice demanded.

"It is I, Denis."

Denis, a tall robust old man with a big grey beard, was standing on the beach with a large staff in his hand, and he too was gazing into the impenetrable distance. He stood there looking for a dry place on his coat in order to strike a match and light his pipe.

"Is it you, mistress, Natalia Sergeievna?" he asked in a surprised voice. "In such weather? What can you do here? With your constitution and after your confinement too, it is certain perdition. Go home, matushka!"

An old woman's wailing was heard. The mother

of the fisherman Evsey, who had gone out to fish with Litvinov, was crying. Denis sighed and waved his hand.

" You have lived in this world seventy years, old woman," he said looking into space, " and you are still like a little child without sense. Why, old fool, God's will is in everything. At your old age you ought to be lying on the stove instead of sitting here in the damp ! Go hence, in God's name."

" Yes, but it's my Evsey, Evsey ! He's my only one, Denisushka ! "

" God's will ! If he is not fated to die in the sea, let us say, then the sea can break up the ice a hundred times, and he will remain alive. But if, mother, he is fated to receive death this day, it is not for us to judge. Old woman—don't cry ! Not only Evsey is on the sea ! The master, Andrey Petrovitch, is there too. Fedka and Kuzma and Tarasinka's Aleshka are also there."

" But are they alive, Denisushka ? " Natalia Sergeevna asked in a trembling voice.

" Who can tell, barynia. If they were not buried by a snow-drift yesterday, or the day before, then they are still alive. If the sea hasn't broken it up, then they are surely alive. Oh, what a wind ! It's as if ordered, God help them ! "

" Somebody is coming across the ice," the young woman said in an unnaturally hoarse voice and as if alarmed, she took a step back.

Denis screwed up his eyes and listened.

" No, barynia, nobody is coming," he said. " It's only that little fool Petrushka, who is sitting in the boat and moving the oars about. Petrushka ! " Denis shouted. " Are you sitting there ? "

"I'm sitting, grand-dad," could be heard in a weak suffering voice.

"Have you pain?"

"Such pain, dad! I can't bear it!"

The boat was lying on the beach, close to the ice, and seated in the bottom of the boat there was a tall lad, with disproportionately long arms and legs. He was the little fool Petrushka. With his teeth tightly set together and trembling in every limb, he was looking into the dark distance and also trying to distinguish something there. He, too, was expecting something from the sea. His long arms had hold of the oars, and his left leg was doubled up under his body.

"Our little fool is ill," said Denis going up to the boat. "His leg is aching, poor soul. Suffering has taken away his sense. Petrushka, you had better go into a warm room. You'll only catch fresh cold here!"

Petrushka was silent and frowned from pain. His left hip was aching, at the back just in the place where the nerve is.

"Go, Petrushka," Denis said in a soft fatherly voice. "Lie down on the stove, and God willing, your leg will get easy."

"I hear!" Petrushka mumbled, and he loosened his jaws.

"What do you hear, little fool?"

"The ice is broken."

"How can you hear that?"

"I hear that sort of noise. The wind makes one noise, the water another. And the wind is different too: softer. Some ten verts from here the ice is breaking."

The old man listened attentively. He listened long,

but in the general hub-bub he could distinguish nothing but the howling of the wind and the monotonous patter of the rain.

Half an hour passed in expectation and silence. The wind did its work. Becoming fiercer and fiercer, it appeared to have decided to break up the ice no matter at what cost and deprive the old mother of Evsey, her son, and the pale-faced woman of her husband. Meanwhile the heavy rain had turned into a drizzle and was soon so light that it became possible to distinguish through the darkness human figures, the silhouette of the boat and the whiteness of the snow. Between the howls of the wind the sound of the bells could be heard. In the little fishing village on the cliffs they were ringing the bells in the ancient belfry. The people who had been caught on the ice-covered sea by the snow-storm, and then by the rain, would be obliged to make their way towards that sound—it was the straw to which drowning men catch.

"Oh, how it aches!" Petrushka groaned, grinding his teeth. "My God, what pain!"

"Have patience, little fool. If you bear it to the end, God will give you the martyr's crown you have earned. God makes no difference, little brother. Little fools are also received into the heavenly Kingdom, only don't grumble."

"I don't grumble, grand-dad. Oh, If I could only die quicker. When I am a little corpse, I shan't suffer such pain. My God!"

"Don't grumble, little fool, don't grumble. Exert yourself!"

"Grand-dad, the water is already near. Do you hear it?"

The grand-dad listened. This time he heard a sound that was not like the howl of the wind or the noise of the trees. The little fool was right. It was no longer possible to hope that Litvinov and his fishermen would return to land to celebrate Christmas.

"It's finished," Denis said. "It's breaking up!"

The old woman bowed to the earth. The mistress, wet and trembling with cold, went up to the boat and listened. And she, too, heard the ominous noise.

"Perhaps it is the wind," she said. "Denis, are you sure it is the breaking up of the ice?"

"God's will. For our sins, madam."

Denis sighed and added in a soft voice:

"Please, go up, madam. Do not kill yourself. You are quite soaked."

The people standing on the beach heard a gentle laugh, a childish laugh of happiness. . . . The pale woman laughed. Denis quacked. He always quacked when he wanted to cry.

"She's out of her mind," he whispered to the dark silhouette of a peasant.

The air suddenly became lighter. The moon looked out. Everything could be seen now. The sea with the half-melted snow-drifts, and the mistress, and Denis, and the little fool Petrushka frowning from unbearable pain. Muzhiks were standing on the side holding a cord in their hands for some reason.

The first furious crack was heard not far from the shore. It was soon followed by a second, a third and the whole ice resounded with terrible cracks. The white boundless mass tossed about and darkened. The monster awoke and re-commenced its stormy existence.

The howling of the wind, the noise of the trees,

Petrushka's groans and the ringing of bells—all were silent before the roar of the sea.

"We must go up," Denis shouted. "The beach will soon be flooded and covered with ice floes. Besides, matins will begin directly, boys. Matushka mistress, come—God has willed it so."

Denis went up to Natalia Sergeievna and took her gently by the elbow.

"Come, matushka," he said tenderly in a voice full of sympathy.

The mistress pushed Denis away with her hand. She lifted her head boldly and walked towards the stairs. She was already not so deadly white; a healthy rose colour played about her cheeks. It was as if fresh blood had been infused into her organism. Her eyes no longer looked tearful and her hands that were drawing her shawl tightly to her breast did not tremble as they had done before. Now she felt that she would be able to go up the whole of the six-hundred-and-thirty-feet-long staircase without anybody's help.

When she put her foot on the third step she stopped as if rooted to the spot. Before her stood a tall, stately man in top-boots and a short fur coat.

"It is I, Natasha. . . . Don't be afraid,"—the man said.

Natalia Sergeievna staggered. She recognized her husband, the landowner Litvinov, in the man who stood before her. It was his tall lambskin cap, his black moustache and his black eyes. Her husband lifted her up in his arms and kissed her on the cheek, and in doing so poured on her the fumes of sherry and cognac. He was slightly tipsy.

"Rejoice, Natasha,"—he said—"I have not perished in the snow nor have I been drowned. During

the snow-storm I and my fishermen succeeded in getting to Taganrog, from where I have come back to you, come back. . . ."

He mumbled, while she, pale and trembling, looked at him with perplexed, frightened eyes. She could not believe it. . . .

"How wet you are, how you tremble," he whispered, pressing her to his breast.

And over his face, that was intoxicated with happiness and wine, there passed a soft and childishly kind smile. . . . He had been waited for in this cold, at this time of the night! Was this not love? And he began to laugh for joy. . . .

A piercing, heart-rending wail was the answer to this gentle, happy laughter. Neither the roar of the sea, nor the wind was able to drown it. With a face contorted with despair, the young woman was unable to suppress this wail, and it burst forth. Everything was heard in it: the forced marriage, the unconquerable antipathy for her husband, the melancholy of loneliness and, lastly, the shattered hope of a free widowhood. Her whole life, with all her sorrows, tears and suffering was poured out in this wail, that was not even deadened by the crashing together of the infloes. Her husband understood this wail, it was not possible to misunderstand it.

"You are sorry I was not buried under the snow, or that the ice did not crush me," he mumbled.

His lower lip trembled and a bitter smile passed over his face. He went down the stairs and placed his wife on the ground.

"Let it be as you wish!" he said.

Turning away from his wife, he went towards the boat. There the little fool Petrushka, with set teeth,

trembling and hopping on one leg, was dragging the boat into the water.

"Where are you going?" Litvinov asked him.

"I'm suffering, your honour. I want to get drowned. . . . Corpses do not suffer. . . ."

Litvinov jumped into the boat. The little fool crawled in after him.

"Good-bye, Natasha!" the landowner shouted. "Let it be as you wish! Receive what you waited for when standing here in the cold. Go ahead!"

The little fool dipped his oars in the water and the boat, knocking up against large pieces of ice, went to meet the high waves.

"Row, Petrushka, row!" Litvinov said—"Further, further!"

Litvinov, holding on the sides of the boat and rocking about, looked back. His Natasha had disappeared, the lights of the pipes had disappeared, and at last the shore disappeared too.

"Return!" he heard a strained woman's voice calling to him. And in that "return" it seemed to him he could hear despair and passioned love that had just burst out.

"Return." . . .

Litvinov's heart throbbed. . . . His wife was calling him, and there, on the shore, the church bells were ringing for the Christmas matins.

"Return!" the same voice repeated in imploring tones.

The echo repeated this word. The blocks of ice crackled this word; the wind shrieked this word, and even the Christmas bells said: "return."

"Let us row back!" said Litvinov, and he pulled the little fool's sleeves.

But the little fool did not hear him. Clenching his teeth together with pain and looking with hope into the distance, he worked his long arms. . . . Nobody called to him : "return," and the pain in his nerves, that began in his childhood, became sharper and more burning. Litvinov seized him by the arms and drew them back. But the arms were hard as stone and it was not easy to tear them away from the oars. Besides, it was too late. A huge block of ice was being washed towards the boat. That block of ice was destined to relieve Petrushka of his pain forever.

The pale woman stood on the beach until morning. When, half frozen and exhausted from moral torment, they carried her home and put her to bed, her lips still continued to whisper : "return."

On Christmas Eve she fell in love with her husband.

## A MISFORTUNE

NIKOLAI MAXIMOVITCH PUTOKHIN had a misfortune which, owing to his expansive and unconcerned Russian nature, he was as little able to swear lie would avoid as prisons or beggary : he got drunk, quite unawares, and in a drunken condition forgot all about his family and his employment and roved about in pleasant places for just five days. Of these five days and nights passed in debauchery, there remained in his mind a sort of absurd hodge-podge of drunken faces, light coloured petticoats, bottles and jiggling legs. He strained his memory and the only thing clear to him was that in the evening, when the street lamps were being lighted, he had turned in to see a friend for a moment on a matter of business, and that his friend had offered him a glass of beer. . . . Putokhin drank one glass, then another and a third. . . . After six bottles the friend went off to see a certain Pavel Semenovitch, who treated them to smoked fish and Madeira. When all the Madeira had been drank they sent for Cognac. Later on there was more and more drink—and the succeeding events were shrouded in fog, through which Putokhin saw things in a sort of absurd dream : the lilac face of a certain Swedish woman who kept on shouting the phrase : “man, treat us to porter” ; a long, low dancing hall full of tobacco smoke and the faces of lackeys ; he saw himself with his thumbs stuck into his waistcoat pockets and his legs twirling about trying to produce the devil only knows what. . . .

Still later he saw as in a dream, a small room with popular wood-cuts and women's garments hanging round the walls. He could remember the odours of spilt porter, flower-smelling eau-de-Cologne and glycerine soap. A little clearer, emerging from the absurd hodge-podge, was the picture of his awakening, feeling so heavy and nasty, that even the light of the sun seemed disgusting to him.

He remembered that he did not find his watch and lockets in his pocket, that he put on another man's tie, and hastened to his office with a drunken, heavy head. Crimson with shame and trembling with tipsy fever he stood before his chief, and his chief, without looking at him, said in an indifferent voice :

" Don't trouble to exculpate yourself . . . I do not understand why you were at the pains of coming here ! It has been decided that you are no longer in our service, sir. . . . We do not require such employees. As an intelligent man you will understand that. . . . Yes, sir."

This indifferent tone, the piercing, screwed up eyes of the chief's, the delicate silence of his colleagues stood out sharply from the rest of the absurdness and had not the appearance of a dream.

" Abominable ! Beastly !" Putokhin mumbled as he returned home after his explanation with his chief. " I've disgraced myself and lost my situation. Vile. Foul ! "

A loathsome feeling of burning spirits filled his whole body, beginning with his mouth and ending with his legs, which he could scarcely move. The feeling as if a whole squadron had passed the night in his mouth\*

\* A quotation from Gogol's *Dead Souls*.

oppressed his whole body and even his soul. He felt ashamed, frightened and disgusted.

"It's time to shoot myself!" he muttered. "Shame and wrath choke me. I can't go on!"

"Yes, it's a bad business!" his colleague Fedor Yeliseitch, who was accompanying him, acquiesced. "It wouldn't so much, but what's bad is you've lost your place. That's the worst of all, brother. It's really about time to shoot one's self. . . ."

"Good Lord, my head, my poor head!" Putokhin muttered frowning with pain. "It's splitting, as though ready to burst. No, do as you like, but I must go into this tavern to recover from my intoxication. . . . Come along!"

The friends entered the tavern.

"I can't understand how I got drunk!—I dread to think of it," said Putokhin after the second glass. "For two years not a drop has passed my lips; I swore to my wife before the icons not to drink. I laughed at drunkards and suddenly—all has gone to the devil! I have neither a place, nor peace. It's terrible!"

He shook his head and continued:

"I am going home as if to execution. I neither regret my watch, nor my money, nor my place. . . . I am ready to be reconciled with all these losses, with this headache, with the governor's lecture . . . but one thing is troubling me: how shall I ever meet my wife? What shall I tell her? For five nights I haven't slept at home, I've squandered all my money on drink and I've lost my place. What can I say to her?"

"Never mind, she will scold and then stop!"

"Now I must appear to her loathsome, wretched.

. . . She can't bear drunken people and, in her opinion every rake is vile—and she is right too. It is not vile to drink away your bread, to dissipate your place, as I have done?"

Putokhin drank off a glass, ate some salted sturgeon and began to muse.

"So to-morrow, it seems, I'll have to walk over to the pawnbrokers," he said after a short silence. "A place is not found soon, so hunger, in all its majesty, is likely to visit us. And women, my good fellow, can forgive everything: a drunken phiz, unfaithfulness, blows, old age—but they won't forgive you poverty. In their eyes—poverty is worse than any vice. My Masha is used to dinner every day, and she must have her dinner even if one has to go and steal. It's impossible to go without dinner, she will say, I'm not really so hungry as I'm ashamed before the servants! Yes, brother, I've studied these women well. I'll be forgiven my five days of debauchery, but hunger will not be forgiven me."

"Yes, you'll have a fine curtain-lecture. . . ." Fedor Yeliseitch said with a sigh.

"She won't reason. . . . She will not consider that I admit my fault, that I am very unhappy. . . . What is all that to her? Women have nothing to do with that, especially when, they are interested in the matter. A man suffers, he is suffocating with shame, he is ready to send a bullet through his head, but he is guilty, he has sinned and he must be whipped. . . . And if only she had scolded you properly, or beaten you—but no: that is not enough, she will meet you unconcernedly, in silence—for a whole week she will punish you with contemptuous silence, she will sting you, plague you with pitiful words. Can you imagine this inquisition?"

"You must beg to be forgiven," his colleague advised.

"A useless trouble. . . . She is too virtuous to forgive us sinners.

On his way home from the tavern, Nikolai Maximovitch tried to invent the words with which he would answer his wife. He imagined her pale, indignant face, tearful eyes, the torrent of stinging words, and his soul was filled with the cowardly feelings of fear that are well known to school boys.

"Oh, well, it's all the same!" he decided as he gave a pull to his own door bell. "What must be—will be! If it becomes unbearable, I'll go away. I'll tell her all and go, wherever my nose leads me."

When he entered his flat, Masha, his wife, was standing in the lobby looking enquiringly at him.

"Let her begin," he thought glancing at her pale face and, hesitatingly, he took off his galoshes.

But she did not begin. . . . He went into the drawing-room, then into the dining-room, and she still remained silent and looked at him enquiringly.

"I'll send a bullet through my head," he decided, being consumed by shame. "I can't bear it any longer! I've no strength left."

For about five minutes he wandered about from place to place, unable to speak. Then he went to the table and wrote with a pencil on a sheet of newspaper: "I've been on the spree and have got the sack. Don't lose courage." He read it and hastened out of the room, into his study.

A little later his wife was sitting next to him, comforting him.

"When it's milled there will be flour," she said. "Be a man, don't despair. . . . God willing, we shall

get over these troubles and you'll find a new place."

He listened, unable to believe his own ears, and not knowing what to answer. He laughed aloud like a child. His wife fed him, allowed him to recover from his intoxication and put him to bed.

The next day courageous and gay he went out to look for a new place, and in a week's time he had found one. The misfortune he had had changed much in him. When he sees drunken men, he does not laugh at them or blame them as formerly. He likes to give alms to drunken beggars and often says :

✓ "The vice does not lie in getting drunk, but in not helping the drunken man to rise again."

Perhaps he is right.

## ON THE RIVER

"THE ice is moving!" this cry was heard on a bright spring day. "Children, the ice is on the move!"

The ice moves quite exactly every spring, but nevertheless the break-up and drift of the ice is an event and forms the talk of the day. When you hear these cries, if you live in town, you will run to the bridge, and there will always be a serious expression on your face, as if a murder had been committed, or a robbery had taken place on the bridge in broad daylight. You see the same expression on the faces of the boys, who run past you and on the faces of the izvozchiks, and of the street hawkers. The bridge is already full of people. There you find schoolboys with their knapsacks, ladies in waterproofs, two or three priests in cassocks, a dirty faced boy carrying a pair of newly made boots by their tags, peasants in coats of all descriptions, and soldiers. All are leaning over the parapet, in silence, motionless and looking enquiringly down at the river. The deathlike silence is only broken by a policeman telling a gentleman in a shaggy coat with a fold down the back, how much the water had risen, and occasionally by the noise of a passing izvozchik. The policeman speaks in a low voice. When it is a question of yards, his face grows serious, and long, almost alarmed, but when he speaks about inches, a look of pity and tenderness appears on his face, just as if the inches were his children.

Leaning over the parapet you also look down at the river and—what a disenchantment ! You had expected crackings and noise, you hear nothing but a dull monotonous rumble somewhat like distant thunder. In place of the stupendous breaking up, collision and friendly thrusts of the ice, you see lying below you undisturbed and motionless piles of broken ice that fill the entire river from bank to bank. The whole surface of the river is dug up and upset, as if a giant ploughman had turned it up with his huge plough. Not a drop of water is to be seen, only ice, ice, ice. The mounds of ice remain motionless, but you feel giddy, and it appears to you that the bridge, with you and all the people on it, is going somewhere. The heavy bridge, together with the banks, hurries along, dividing the stream with its piers. Here a large block of ice presses upon an ice-breaker of one of the piers and for a long time, prevents the bridge from running away from it. Then suddenly as if alive it begins to crawl up the pier, straight towards your face, as if it wanted to take leave of you, but not able to support its own weight, snaps in two pieces and falls back feebly. The appearance of the blocks of ice is mournful and dejected. They seem to know that they are being driven away from their native place, far away to the terrible Volga where, after witnessing all sorts of horrors, they would die, and turn to nothing.

Soon the hillocks become less numerous, and dark, rapidly flowing water is seen between the blocks of ice. Now the deception disappears and you begin to see that it is not the bridge, but the river that moves. By evening the river is almost free of ice. Occasionally a block of ice, still remaining on the river, is to be seen, but these blocks are so few, that they do not prevent

the lamps from looking at themselves in the water, as if it were a mirror.

"This is not real drift ice!" somebody says on the bridge. "The real drift will be when the ice from up river will come down! A man arrived at mid-day from the N-district, he says that the ice is already moving there, so we can expect it to-morrow."

Indeed, as predicted, the next day is dull; a cold damp wind blows. Such a sudden change shows, that somewhere ice is moving over a great space. . . . People again congregate on the bridge and again look at the river. The water is high, but the surface is clean and smooth. The spectators yawn impatiently, and shrink together with cold. At last a large block of ice appears on the surface of the river and, like a flock of sheep going after the same, several smaller blocks follow it at a respectful distance. The thump of ice against the piers of the bridge can be heard. The block is shattered and its fragments, twirling about in confusion and knocking against each other, rush along under the bridge. Another of these blocks can be seen at the bend of the river, it is followed by a second, a third—and soon the whole air is filled with the dull sounds that were heard the day before. Now you see not the ice of the place, but the ice from the sources of the river.

This ice is also soon lost, but with its disappearance the vernal animation of the river is not over. Immediately after the ice drift the timber rafts begin to appear.

These rafts ought to be viewed, not in the town, but somewhere farther away. If possible even at those mysterious sources from which the last ice had come down.

There on the little river Zhizha, veering about and

wriggling like a serpent, a long raft of timber comes floating down the stream. In the summer the Zhizha is nothing but a puddle, which you can scarcely see beneath the thick growth of willows on its banks, and you can ford it wherever you like—now it is unrecognizable. Looking at it you are astonished! Wherever has this rapid stream come? It is swollen, overflowing and threatens to inundate the whole earth. It treats the big raft as if it were a little ship. This raft is late; it is one of the last, and is threatened with the possibility of sticking half way. The merchant Makitrov sent down six rafts already yesterday. He ought to have been satisfied with that, but the avidity conquered, and he dispatched a seventh to-day although he was warned, that the water was already sinking.

On the raft about twenty men and women are bustling about. A real muzhik, one who is satisfied and properly clad, will not go as a raftsman, therefore, you see here only utter misery. The people are all undersized, round-shouldered, of a morose aspect, and gnarly character. They are all in bast-shoes and in such garments that one thinks if the muzhik were taken by the shoulders and well shaken the rags that are hanging from him would fall to the earth. Each of them has his own special face; there are faces red as clay; others swarthy as arabs; some have faces on which the beard is just beginning to pierce through, while others have faces all hairy like animals; each one has his own special torn cap, his own rags, his own voice; nevertheless to an unaccustomed eye they seem all alike, so that it is necessary to be among them for a long time before you can distinguish which of them is Mitry, which Ivan or which Kuz'ma. Such a

striking resemblance is imprinted on all these pale, morose faces, on all these rags and tattered caps by irremediable poverty.

Their work is incessant. At every step the Zhizha winds about, therefore the whole time they have to run from side to side and work with poles to prevent the raft, which is being borne down the stream, from running into the bank, or driving up against a rock on which it might be torn asunder. . . . They are all wet, sweating and breathing heavily. Not one of them is sitting down, although straw had been strewn in the middle of the rafts for them to rest on. The women, gaunt and tattered, with fluttering, wet and draggled skirts do the same work as the men.

Both banks are flooded by the bright light of the mid-day sun, and pictures, one more beautiful than the other, flash before the raftsmen's eyes. With the rapidity of a bird's flight forests, pastures, villages, gentlemen's estates pass before their eyes. Now they see before them a white church with a green cupola, perched on a high steep hill. A moment after the church has disappeared, only a plain, inundated, for a great distance, by the angry Zhizha, black pasture-lands, speckled with what might be either rocks or jackdaws, stretch out beyond the plain.

Now a tall lank muzhik is driving a lean cow with one horn along the bank. . . . Farther on there is a gentleman's house : a lady with a sunshade is standing on a small balcony, and hastens to point out the raft to some girls ; a young man in a short tunic and top boots is looking into a creel. . . . Then again pastures, forests, villages. . . . If you look back now the white church scarcely appears white on the horizon and all traces of the man with a cow have disappeared. . . . Don't

think that the raft has gone far. A little more time passes and the raftsmen see something white on the horizon. They begin to examine it and—what is this wonder? They are floating towards the same church that they had just left behind them. The nearer they approach it the more they are convinced, that it is the same church, with the green cupola, on the top of a steep hill. Now they can see the windows, the cross on the summit, the chimney on the roof. They have but to go on a few minutes more and the raftsmen will be at the very church—but the raft takes a sharp turning and the church again remains behind.

Seizing a spare moment three or four of the raftsmen move towards the middle of the raft, look at each other and breathe heavily. They are resting. Among them you will notice the only man in boots, but what terrible boots—crooked and reddish, still they are boots. A church that is left behind is still a church! Narrow cloth trousers are stuffed into the boots and what trousers, they are too—so utterly worthless that it would be a sin to criticize them.

The man in the boots is dressed in a tattered short fur coat, through the holes of which his waistcoat is visible. Sticking on his large head there is a discarded gymnasium boy's cap with a broken peak and indescribably dirty edges. His face, lean and wrinkled, is quite unlike the faces of the other raftsmen. In a word he is an individual, who in Russia is now never absent from any workman's association, from any public house, nor from any gathering of beggars and paupers. This individual has been terribly bruised by fate and, being entirely convinced of his own lowness, he tries to hide the "nobility" of which he is supposed to be the possessor. He breathes more freely in this torn

peasant's sheepskin, than he would in the cloth over-coat or waistcoat that you, in your liberality, would like to bestow upon him. One even feels sorry to question him as to who he is, whence he comes, what he has been, and what his intentions are ; besides, it is useless. If you ask him, he is sure to lie to you, and tell you he has been an officer, an actor, and in prison.

On the raft this individual is called Diomedes. Diomedes has become a raftsman not so much because he wanted to make three or four roubles, but because he was delighted to be able to get to town for nothing and avoid in this way tramping there on foot. The novelty of the work interests him, and he tries in every way not to be inferior to the muzhiks in industry. Like the others he runs from side to side, bustles about, pushes with the pole, sweats, can scarcely breathe, but the want of habit can be seen in all his movements. He does not understand the work, besides he has little strength and gets soon tired. . . . Whenever he sees that two or three have stopped to rest he is sure to join them.

The men at rest look at each other and begin a conversation. The subject of conversation on the rafts is always the same.

" What times, what bad times . . . it's really terrible ! " says the man with a goat's beard and the cap with laps for the ears. " Five years ago not a single raftsman would take less than eight roubles. For eight, if you like, I'll go, but I won't take less," he'd say. " Now they hardly give four, eh ? It's a real punishment ! The Lord alone knows why it is so ! "

" The people have greatly multiplied . . ." cries the man with the square beard. " There is no room for all these folk. If you won't go for four, another will go for three. There was a time when even for money

you would not have seen a woman on a raft, and now just look how many we have here! Women are stupid, they'll go even for one rouble."

"Four roubles," grumbles the goat's beard, meditatively looking at the approaching bank. "Four. . . . A nice thing!"

Diomedes had come not for money, it was all the same to him if he got four or eight roubles, but in order to join in the conversation he considers it necessary to confirm this.

"Hm, yes," he says, "Money is scabby. But, brothers, all this comes because the merchant has grown fat. He's afraid of parting with his money."

The others do not answer Diomedes. They look forward in the direction the raft is hurrying and see a whitening spot. The raft again is floating towards the same white church. God's temple twinkles affectionately at them with the sun reflected from its cross and its glossy green cupola and seems to promise not to lose sight of them.

"Howsomever what twistings the river makes here," Diomedes says. "We float on and on, and only twirl about in the same place."

"If you drive straight to town it's about fifty versts, but if you go by river it will be about six hundred, I think. Ekh, God willing, and the water doesn't fall we'll be there by to-morrow night. . . ."

The day passes happily, without any adventures, but in the evening, they run into a misfortune. Suddenly through the approaching twilight the raftsmen notice an obstacle in the river. A lighter is firmly moored to one bank from which a light foot-bridge of boards, which has evidently just been knocked together, stretches over to the other bank. How are they to

get through ? There is great movement on the banks. Several people run towards the raft waving their arms and shouting.

“ Stop ! Stop ! Devil’s dogs ! ”

The panic-stricken raftsmen stop the raft.

“ You dare not float any further ! ” a stout man with a red face, wearing a long cloth overcoat shouts. “ I’ll frighten you in such a way to the devil, with your wood there, that you won’t remain alive ! Already my foot bridge has been broken twice and I won’t allow you to do it again.”

The raftsmen look at each other, hesitate and take off their caps.

“ How are we to manage it, your honour ? ” one of them asks.

“ As you like, only I’ll not allow you to break my bridge. My people are always going backward and forward to the factory and they can’t do without the bridge.”

“ Your honour can depend upon us ! ” the raftsmen assure him with tearful voices. “ Have the goodness ! We shall take your bridge to pieces and put it up again, in perfect order. . . . Quite conscientiously ! We will always pray for you ! ”

“ Oh, yes, I know you ! Don’t you dare ! ”

The red faced man threatens with his hand, and goes away. The raftsmen stand dejected.

“ How dare he ? ” Diomedes exclaims excitedly, “ What self-will ? He has no right to build his footbridge before the appointed date ! Comrades, don’t pay attention to him ! Why should we listen to a blockhead ! ”

Diomedes harangues excitedly for a long time, and till nightfall the raftsmen walk about on the bank cap-

in hand and bowing, but nothing is of any avail. . . . They have to be reconciled to their fate.

All night a light is burning near the foot-bridge. The raftsmen, drenched and benumbed, in silence and not allowing themselves a moment's rest, carry their logs over the footbridge and attach them together in a new raft on the other side. They swarm like ants at this Egyptian labour all the night, to the very morning.

And in the morning they float on again.

## THE MISTRESS

### I

RACKETING and rustling over the dry and dusty grass a calèche drawn by two handsome Vyatka horses drove up to Maxim Zhurkin's izba\*. Seated in the calèche was the mistress Elena Egorovna Strelkova and her bailiff Felix Adamovich Rzhevetsky. The bailiff jumped adroitly out of the calèche, went up to the izba and tapped his forefinger on the window. A light twinkled in the izba.

"Who is there?" was asked in an old woman's voice, and the head of Maxim's wife appeared at the window.

"Come out into the street, granny!" the mistress called to her.

A minute later Maxim and his wife came out of the izba they stopped at the gate and silently bowed to the mistress and then to the bailiff.

"Have the goodness to tell me what all this means?" Elena Egorovna asked the old man.

"What do you mean, madam?"

"How what? Don't you know? Isn't Stepan at home?"

"No, madam. He's gone to the mill."

"Why is he giving himself such airs? I really can't understand the man! Why has he left my service?"

"We don't know, madam. How are we to know?"

\* The log hut of a Russian peasant.

"It is very ill-mannered on his part ! He left me without a coachman ! Felix Adamovich has had the goodness to harness the horses himself and to drive me here. It is very stupid ! Don't you understand that is really stupid ! Does he think his wages were too low, is it that ?"

"God alone can know !" the old man answered with a side-long glance at the bailiff, who was looking in at the window.

"He tells us nothing, and we can't get into his head. 'I've left,' he says, and that's all ! He's his will ! I suppose he found the wages too little !"

"Who is lying there on the bench beneath the icons ?" Felix Adamovich asked trying to see through the window.

"That's Semion, batyushka ! \* Stepan is out."

"It was insolent of him !" the mistress continued as he lit a cigarette. "Monsieur Rzhevetsky, what were the wages he received from us ?"

"Ten roubles a month."

"If he found ten roubles too little, I might pay him fifteen ! He did not say a word, but went away ! Was that honest ? Was that conscientious ?"

"Have I not told you never to be on ceremonics with these people ?" Rzhevetsky interrupted; pronouncing each word distinctly and endeavouring not to place the accent on the penultimate syllable. "You have spoilt these drones ! One must never give the whole of the wages ! What is the use of it ? He'll come back ! He accepted the conditions, he hired himself ! Tell him ;" the Pole turned towards Maxim,—"that he is a swine, and nothing more !"

"Finissez, done !"

\* Little father.

"Muzhik, do you hear? He hired himself—then he must work and not go away when the fancy takes him, the devil! He'll catch it if he does not come to-morrow! I'll teach him not to obey! And you'll catch it too! Do you hear, old woman!"

"Finissez, Rzhevetsky!"

"You'll all catch it! Don't dare to appear before me in the office, you old dog! Is one to stand on ceremonies with you? Are you people? Do you understand kind words? You only understand when your backs feel the lash and unpleasant things are done to you! See that he comes to-morrow!"

"I'll tell him. Why shouldn't I tell him? It's possible to tell him. . . ."

"Tell him I will increase his wages," Elena Egorovna said, "I can't be without a coachman. When I find another one, he may leave if he wishes. He must be again at my place to-morrow morning. Tell him I am deeply offended by his rude behaviour. And you, granny, tell it him too! I hope he will be there and not oblige me to send for him again. Come here, granny! Here, take this! I'm sure it must be difficult to manage such big children. Take it, my good soul!"

The mistress pulled a pretty cigar case out of her pocket, took out a yellow paper that was lying under the cigarettes and gave it to the old woman.

"If he does not come," the mistress added, "we shall have to quarrel, which is very undesirable. But I hope . . . advise him. Felix Adamovich, we can go now! Good-bye!"

Rzhevetsky jumped into the calèche, took the reins into his hand and the calèche drove off over the soft road.

" How much did she give you ? " the old man asked.

" One rouble."

" Give it here ! "

The old man took the rouble-note, smoothed it out between his two palms, folded it up carefully and put it into his pocket.

" Stepan, she's driven away," he said going into the izba. " Terammed said you had gone to the mill. She was terribly scared ! . . . "

As soon as the calèche had driven away and had disappeared out of sight, Stepan showed himself at the window. He was pale as death, and trembling he crawled half out of the window and shook his large fist at the distant darkening garden. The garden belonged to his mistress. Having shaken his fist in that direction about six times, he grumbled something and drawing his body back into the izba closed the window noisily.

Half an hour after the mistress had driven away they had supper in Zhurkin's izba. Zhurkin and his wife were seated close to the stove at a greasy table. Their eldest son Semion, a soldier who was home on leave, sat opposite them ; he had a red drunken face, a long, pock-marked nose, and oily eyes. Semion was very like his father in the face, only he was not grey nor bald, and he had not the cunning gipsy-like eyes that his father had. Maxim's second son, Stepan, was sitting next to Semion. Stepan did not eat, but supporting his handsome fair-haired head on his fist he looked up at the smoky ceiling, and was thinking earnestly about something. Stepan's wife, Maria, served the supper. They ate the cabbage soup in silence.

" Take it away," Maxim said when they had finished [the cabbage soup].

Maria removed the empty basin from the table, but she did not carry it safely as far as the stove, although the stove was not far off. She staggered and fell upon a bench. The basin fell out of her hands and slipped from her knees on to the floor. Sobs were heard.

"She seems to be crying?" Maxim asked.

Maria sobbed still louder. Two minutes passed. The old woman rose and went herself to fetch the gruel. Stepan groaned and got up.

"Stop that noise!" he muttered.

Maria continued crying.

"Stop that noise, don't you hear!" Stepan shouted.

"I can't abide woman's squeals," Semion grumbled boldly, and he scratched the rough back of his head. "She howls and doesn't know why she howls! Do you hear, woman! Howl in the yard if you want to!"

"Woman's tears are but drops of water!" Maria said. "Tears can't be bought, you can have them for nothing. Well, why are you howling! Eka! Stop it! They won't take your Stepan from you! You've been spoilt! You're delicate! Come, gobble up your gruel!"

Stepan bent over Maria and tapped her lightly on the elbow.

"Well, what is it! Hold your tongue! Don't you hear! Eh-Eh-Eh. . . . Trash!"

Stepan swung his arm and struck the bench, on which Maria was lying, with his fist. A large glittering tear crept down his cheek. He brushed the tear away, sat down at the table and began to eat the gruel. Maria rose sobbing, and sat down beyond the stove as far as she could get from the other people. She ate her gruel,

" Maria, kvass !\* Young woman, know your duty ! It's a shame to snivel like that !" the old man shouted. " You're not an infant ! "

With a pale and tear-stained face Maria left the room, and returning, handed a scoop to the old man without looking at anybody. The scoop was passed round. Semion took the scoop into his hand, crossed himself, drank, and choked.

" What are you laughing at ? "

" Nothing . . . it's only so. I remembered something funny."

Semion threw back his head, opened his large mouth and began to laugh.

" Has the mistress been here ? " he asked with a glance at Stepan. " Eh ? And what did she say ? Eh ? Ha-ha-ha ! "

Stepan looked at Semion and became crimson.

" She offers fifteen roubles," the old man answered.

" Ho-ho ! She'd give a hundred if he only wanted ! By God, she would ! "

Stepan winked and stretched himself.

" Ekh, if I only found such a woman ! " he continued, " I would suck her dry, the she-devil ! I'd squeeze out all her juice ! V-v-v ! . . . "

Semion shrunk together, struck Stepan on the shoulder and laughed again.

" So it is, good soul ! You're too easily abashed ! To be abashed is not for us-like ! You're a fool, Stepan ! Oh, what a fool you are ! "

" Indeed, he is a fool ! " said his father.

Sobs were heard again.

" Your wife's howling again ! She seems to be jealous, afraid of tickling ! I don't like women's

\* A sort of non-alcoholic drink.

squealing. It cuts like a knife ! Oh, women, women ! ✓ For what object has God created you ? Where was the good of it ? *Merci* for the supper, honourable people ! Now to drink some wine, to have beautiful dreams ! Your mistress, I suppose, has quantities of wine. Drink it, I don't want it ! ”

“ Senka, you're a feelingless brute ! ”

Having said this Stepan sighed, made a bundle of a felt cover and went out of the izba. Semion followed him almost at once.

It was quiet out of doors, the Russian summer night came on calmly. The moon rose above the distant hillocks. Ragged clouds with silver edges floated to meet her. The horizon grew dim and its whole extent was suffused with pleasant greenish tints. The stars twinkled faintly and, as if afraid of the moon, drew in their little rags. From the river the night damp, that seemed to caress the cheeks, was spreading in every direction. From Father Grigory's izba the sound of a clock striking nine tinkled through the whole village. The Jewish publican closed his window noisily, and hung out a greasy lantern above his door. There was not a soul nor a sound in the street, nor in any of the yards. Stepan spread his felt cover on the grass, crossed himself and lay down resting his head on his elbow. Semion grunted and sat down at his feet.

“ Hm . . . yes . . . ” he said.

After a short silence Semion made himself more comfortable, lit a short pipe and continued :

“ I went to Trofims to-day. . . . Had some beer there. Drank three bottles. Do you want to smoke, Stiopa ? ”

“ I don't.”

"It's good tobacco. I'd like to have tea now ! Have you had tea with the mistress ? Wasn't it good ? It must have been very good ? It probably cost five roubles a pound. There's a sort of tea that costs a hundred roubles a pound. By God there is. I know it, though I've never drunk it. When I was serving as a clerk in town I saw it. . . . One lady drank it. The scent alone was worth much ! I smelt it. Let's go to the mistress to-morrow ? "

"Don't bother ! "

"Why are you angry ? I'm not scolding, I'm only talking. There's no cause to be angry. But why shouldn't you go ? You're a queer fellow. I can't understand you ! There's lots of money, good food and drink as much as your soul desires. . . . You'll smoke her cigars, you'll drink good tea. . . . "

Semion was silent for a short time and then continued :

"And she's pretty too. To get entangled with an old woman is misery—but with this one—it's happiness ! (Semion spat and was silent). She's a fiery woman ! Flaming fire ! She has a fine neck, such a plump one. . . . "

"What if it's a sin for the soul ? " Stepan, turning towards Semion, asked suddenly.

"A s-i-n ? Where's the sin ? Nothing's a sin for a poor man."

"A poor man can also get into the devil's burning furnace if. . . . But am I a poor man ? I'm not poor."

~ "But what sin is there in it ? You don't go to her, but she comes to you ! Scare-crow ! "

"Brigand ! And you argue like a brigand ! "

"You're a stupid fellow !" Semion said sighing.

"Stupid! You don't understand your good luck! You don't feel it. You've probably too much money. That's why you don't require money."

"I require it, but not other people's!"

"You won't steal it. She'll give it you with her own little hands. But what's the use of talking to a fool like you? It's like throwing pans at a wall. . . . You're only fit to pickle cabbage."

Semion rose and stretched himself.

"You'll repent, but it will be too late! After this I don't want to know you any more. You're no brother of mine! Go to the devil . . . and carry on with your fool of a cow. . . ."

"Is Maria a cow?"

"Yes, Maria."

"Hm. . . . You're not worthy to be the sole of that cow's shoes. Go!"

"It would be good for you and for us too. . . . Fool!!"

"Go!"

"I'm going. . . . There's nobody to thrash you!"

Semion turned round and sauntered back to the izba, whistling. Five minutes later the grass rustled near Stepan. He raised his head. Maria was coming towards him. Maria came up, stood near him for a moment and then lay down at his side.

"Stiopa, don't go!" she whispered. "My darling, don't go! She will ruin you! Has she not enough with the Pole, curse her, but she must have you too. Don't go to her, Stiopushka!"

"Don't bother!"

Maria's tears fell like fine rain on Stepan's face.

"Don't ruin me, Stepan! Don't take a sin on your soul. Love only me, don't go to others! God has

joined you to me, live only with me! I'm an orphan. . . . You are my only one."

"Leave me alone! Ah . . . Satan! Haven't I told you, I won't go."

✓ "Yes, yes. . . . Don't go, dearie! I am with child, Stiopushka. Soon there'll be a baby. . . . Don't desert us, God will punish you! Father and Semion will do all they can to make you go to her, but don't go. . . . Don't listen to them. They are beasts—not men."

"Go to sleep!"

"I'm asleep, Stiopa. . . . I'm asleep."

"Maria!" Maxim called. "Where are you? Go, mother is calling."

Maria jumped up, arranged her hair and ran into the izba. Maxim came slowly up to Stepan. He had already undressed, and looked like a corpse in his under linen. The moon played on his bald head and shone in his gipsy-like eyes.

"Are you going to the mistress to-morrow, or the next day?" he asked Stepan.

Stepan did not answer.

"If you mean to go, go to-morrow, and early. The horses are sure to want cleaning. And don't forget, she promised fifteen. Don't go for less."

"I won't go at all," Stepan said.

"Why not?"

"So. . . . I don't want to."

"What's your reason?"

"You know very well."

"So. . . . Look here, Stiopa, don't make me have to thrash you, in my old age."

"Thrash me."

"How dare you answer your father like that?"

Whom do you answer? Take care! The milk has hardly dried on your lips and you are insolent to your father."

"I won't go, that's all. You go to church, but do not fear sin."

"I want to give you your share, you stupid fellow. Oughtn't I build you a new izba? Don't you think so? Where are we to go for timber? To Strelchikha, of course? From whom are we to borrow money? Is it from her or not from her? She'll give the timber and the money too. She'll reward you!"

"Let her reward others. I don't want it."

"I'll thrash you!"

"Well, thrash me! Thrash me!"

Maxim smiled and stretched out his hand. There was a whip in his hand.

"I'll thrash you, Stepan."

Stepan turned over to the other side and pretended that he was being prevented from sleeping.

"So you won't go? Do you mean what you say?"

"I mean it! May God destroy my soul if I go."

Maxim lifted his arm and Stepan felt a sharp pain on his shoulder and on his cheek. Stepan sprang up like a madman.

"Don't fight, daddy!" he shouted. "Don't fight! Do you hear? Don't fight!"

"And why not?"

Maxim thought for a moment and struck Stepan again. He struck him a third time.

"Obey your father, when he commands! Will you go? Blackguard!"

"Don't fight! Do you hear?"

...

Stepan began to scream, and fell down on the felt cover.

"I will go ! Very well ! I will go. . . . But remember, you will regret it. You will curse me !"

"All right, you are going for your own sake, not for me. I don't want a new izba, but you do. I told you I would thrash you and I've thrashed you !"

"I will go ! But you will remember this whip !"

"All right. Threaten ! How dare you speak to me."

"Very well. . . . I'll go. . . ."

Stepan ceased screaming, turned over to his stomach and began to cry more quickly.

"Shake your shoulders. Snivel ! Squall away ! Go early to-morrow. Take a month in advance. And don't forget to take for the four days you have already served. It will do for a shawl for your mare. Don't be angry about the thrashing. I'm your father. . . . When I wish—I thrash, when I wish—I pardon. That's my affair. . . . Sleep !"

Maxim stroked his beard and returned to the izba. It seemed to Stepan that when he entered the izba he said : "I thrashed him !" He heard Semion laugh.

In Father Grigory's izba somebody began to play plaintively on a piano very much out of tune. The priest's daughter usually occupied herself with music at about nine o'clock. Faint strange sounds were borne through the village. Stepan rose, crawled over the wattles and went along the street. He went towards the river. The river shone like quick silver and reflected in itself the sky with the moon and the stars. The silence of the grave reigned everywhere. Nothing moved. Only a cricket chirped from time to time. Stepan sat down on the bank close to the water

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simply, in a light summer frock. Her hair was done in the most primitive manner. Strelkova was lazy and did not like to trouble about her toilet. The estate on which she lived belonged to her brother, a bachelor, who resided in Petersburg and thought very seldom about his estate. She had lived on it ever since she had left her husband. Her husband, Colonel Strelkov, a very respectable man, also resided in Petersburg, and thought of his wife even less than her brother did about his estate. She had left her husband before she had lived a year with him. She had been unfaithful to him on the twentieth day after their marriage.

When she had sat down to drink her coffee Strelkova ordered Stepan to be sent for. Stepan appeared and remained standing near the door. He was pale and unkempt and looked as a captured wolf looks : wicked and gloomy. The mistress looked at him and blushed slightly.

"Good morning, Stepan !" she said as she poured out a cup of coffee for herself. "Tell me, please, what sort of tricks are you playing ? Why did you go away ? You lived here four days and left ! Left without leave. You ought to have asked ! "

"I asked leave," Stepan mumbled.

"Whom did you ask ? "

"Felix Adamovich."

Strelkova was silent, and then she asked.

"Were you angry ? " Stepan did not answer.

"I am asking you. Were you angry ? "

"If you hadn't said such words, I would not have left. I was hired for the horses and not for. . . ."

"We won't speak about that. . . . You did not understand me, that's all. There's no cause to be angry. I said nothing so very special. And even if I

had said something that you thought offensive for you, than you . . . than you. . . . Still I am. . . . I have the right to say a word too much. . . . Hm. . . . I will increase your wages. I hope that now we shall have no misunderstandings."

Stepan turned round and stepped back.

"Wait, wait!" Strelkova stopped him. "I have not said everything. You see, Stepan. . . . I have a new coachman's dress. Take it and put it on, the one you are in is worth nothing. I have a very fine coat. I'll send it to you by Fedor."

"Yes, mum!"

"What a face you have. You're still sulking? Was it really so insulting? Well, now it's enough. . . . I only meant. . . . You'll find it nice to live with me. . . . You'll be satisfied with everything. Don't be angry. . . . Don't be angry. . . ."

"How can we be angry?"

Stepan waved his hand, blinked and turned away.

"What's the matter, Stepan?"

"Nothing. . . . How can we be angry? We can't be angry. . . ."

The mistress rose, looked troubled and went up to Stepan.

"Stepan, you . . . you are crying?"

The mistress took hold of Stepan's sleeve.

"What's the matter with you, Stepan? What's the matter? Tell me? Who has offended you?"

Tears appeared in the mistress's eyes.

"Well, what is it?"

Stepan waved his hand, his eyes blinked rapidly and he sobbed.

"Mistress!" he mumbled. "I will love you. . . . I will do everything you wish! I agree! Only

don't give them, those ungodly fellows, anything ! Not a copeck, not a chip ! I agree to anything. I'll sell my soul to the devil, only don't give them anything."

" Who are they ? "

" My father and my brother. . . . Not a chip ! Let them, the ungodly, die from their wickedness ! "

The mistress smiled, wiped her eyes and laughed aloud.

" Very well," she said. " Well, go ! I shall send you your clothes at once ! "

Stepan left the room.

" It's as well that he's stupid," the mistress thought, as she looked after him and admired his vast brawny shoulders. " He has saved me an explanation. . . . He was the first to speak about ' love ' . . . . "

Towards evening, when the setting sun suffused the sky with purple and the earth with gold, the Strelkova horses raced like mad along the endless road that led over the steppes from the village to the distant horizon. The calèche jumped about like a ball and tore up the ears of the rye that bent their heavy heads over the road, without any mercy. Stepan, seated on the coachbox, whipped the horses furiously and seemed to be trying to tear the reins into a thousand pieces. He was dressed with great taste and it was evident that much time and money had been spent on his clothes. The rich velvet and red fustian sat closely to his stalwart figure. A watch-chain with breloques hung across his chest. His high boots pleated like an accordion were brilliantly polished with quite real blacking. A coachman's hat and peacock's feathers scarcely touched his fair curly hair. Dumb submission was written on his face, and at the same time sheer madness whose

victims the horses were. The mistress sat back in the calèche with all her limbs outstretched, and her broad bosom breathed in the healthy air. A youthful rosiness played on her cheeks. . . . She felt that she was enjoying life.

"Capital, Stiopa ! Capital !" she called to him. "That's right ! Drive them on ! Like the wind !"

If there had been stones beneath the wheels, the stones would have been shattered in sparks. . . . The village was farther and farther away from them. The izbas disappeared, the master's farms disappeared . . . Soon the belfry was to be seen no more. At last the village faded into a smoky line and was drowned in the distance. But Stepan drove on and on, he wanted to whirl farther away from the sin, which he feared so much. But no, the sin sat behind his shoulders in the calèche. Stepan was unable to make his escape. *That evening the steppes and the sky witnessed how he sold his soul. . . .*

At about eleven o'clock the calèche was whirling back. The side horse was lame, and the shafter was covered with foam. The mistress sat in a corner of the calèche huddled up in her cloak with half-closed eyes. A satisfied smile played about her lips. She could breathe so easily, so quickly. Stepan drove on and thought he was about to die. . . . His head felt empty and foggy and anguish gnawed at his breast.

Every day towards evening fresh horses were led out of the stable. Stepan harnessed them to the calèche and drove up to the garden gate. The mistress came through the gate beaming, sat down in the calèche and the mad drive began. Not a single day passed without this drive. It was Stepan's ill luck, that not a single

rainy evening fell to his share on which he might not have had to drive out.

After one of these drives, on returning from the steppe, Stepan went out of the yard and walked along the river bank. As usual, his head felt foggy, there was not a single thought in it and in his breast there was terrible anguish. The night was fine and calm. Delicate aromas were borne in the air and played softly about his face. Stepan remembered the village that lay darkly before his eyes beyond the river. He remembered the izba the kitchen-garden, his horse, the bench on which he slept with his Maria and was so satisfied. . . . He felt unbearable pain. . . .

"Stiopa!" he heard a weak voice call.

Stepan looked round. Maria was coming towards him. She had just crossed the ford and was carrying her shoes in her hand.

"Stiopa, why did you go away?"

Stepan looked stupidly at her and then turned away.

"Stiopushka, for whom have you left me, poor orphan?"

"Leave off!"

"God is sure to punish, Stiopushka! He will punish you! He will send you a cruel death, you will die impenitent! Remember my words! Uncle Trofim lived with a soldier's wife—do you remember? and how he died? May God preserve us!"

"Why do you worry me? Ekh!"

Stepan took two steps forward. Maria caught hold of his kaftan with both hands.

"But I am your wife, Stepan! You can't throw me over in that way! Stiopushka!" Maria entreated: "Dearie! I will wash your feet and drink water! Come home!"

Stepan tore himself away and struck Maria with his fist. He struck her only from grief. His blow struck her just in the stomach. Maria groaned, seized hold of her stomach and sat down on the ground.

"Oh, oh!" she moaned.

Stepan began blinking, clasped his temples in his fists and went towards the yard without looking back.

When he got to the stables he fell upon a bench, put a pillow on his head and bit his arm till it ached.

At that time the mistress was sitting in her bedroom telling her fortune, with cards: she was asking: "if to-morrow evening would be fine or not?" The cards said it would be fine.

### III

VERY early in the morning Rzhevetsky was driving home from a party at a friend's house. The sun had not risen yet. It was not more than four o'clock in the morning. Rzhevetsky was slightly tipsy. His head nodded as he drove his horse. Half the way he had to drive through a forest.

"What the devil?" he thought when he approached the estate on which he was the bailiff. "Surely somebody is felling trees!"

Out of the thickness of the forest the sounds of the chopping of wood and the cracking of branches was borne to Rzhevetsky's ears. Rzhevetsky pricked up his ears, reflected, swore, got down awkwardly from his racing droshky and went into the thicket.

Semion Zhurkin was sitting on the ground chopping off the green branches with an axe. Three felled alders were lying on the ground. A horse harnessed to a dray was standing on one side eating grass. Rzhevetsky saw

Semion. All traces of inebriation and drowsiness left him in an instant. He grew pale and rushed towards Semion.

"What are you doing here? Eh?" he shouted.

"What are you doing here? Eh?" the echo answered.

Semion did not say a word. He lit his pipe and continued to work.

"What are you doing, scoundrel, I ask you?"

"Don't you see? Have your eyes trickled out?"

"Wh-at? What did you say? Repeat it?"

"I only said, pass on!"

"What, what, what?"

"Pass on! Don't shout. . . ."

Rzhevetsky grew very red and shrugged his shoulders.

"That's how you are? How dare you?"

"You see I dare. What do you want here? You're afraid! You're many! To supplicate each of you would require much. . . ."

"How dare you cut down trees? Are they yours?"

"Nor are they yours."

Rzhevetsky lifted his whip but did not strike Semion only because the latter pointed to his axe.

"Don't you, blackguard, know whose forest it is?"

"I know, panie! It's Strelchikha's wood, so I'll talk to Strelchikha. It's her wood, so I'll answer to her. What have you to do with it? Lackey! Waiter! I don't know you. Move on, passer-by, march!"

Semion tapped on the axe with his pipe and smiled malignantly.

Rzhevetsky ran to his droshky, hit the horse with the reins, and fled to the village like a dart. In the village

he collected witnesses and hastened with them to the scene of the crime. The witnesses found Semion still at work. In an instant the case was expedited. The elders and their assistants, the scribes and the village policeman appeared on the scene. Several papers were made out. Rzhevetsky signed them and Semion was forced to sign them too. Semion only laughed.

Shortly before dinner hour Semion went to the mistress. The mistress already knew about the trees that had been felled. Without saying how-do-you-do to her he began to complain that it was impossible to live, the Pole was always trying to fleece them, he had only taken three trees, and so on. . . .

"How did you dare to fell trees in another person's wood!" the mistress shouted.

"He only makes trouble," Semion mumbled, admiring the mistress's anger and desiring at any cost to plague the Pole. "At every word there's a blow. Are such things possible? He always aims at the face. That cannot be. . . . Why, we are also men."

"How dare you cut my timber. That's what I ask you. Scoundrel!"

"He has been lying to you mistress! I really did cut. . . . I confess it. . . . But why does he fight?"

Her masterful blood boiled in the mistress's veins. She forgot that Semion was Stepan's brother, she forgot her own good breeding, she forgot everything, and boxed Semion's ears.

"Pack off with that muzhik's mug of yours!" she shouted. "Be off this instant!"

Semion became confused. He had never expected such a row.

"Good-bye, mum!" he said drawing a long breath, "What's to be done? What!" he mumbled and left

the room. He even forgot to put on his cap when he got to the yard.

About two hours later Maxim appeared before the mistress. His face was drawn, his eyes were dull. One could see by his face that he had come to say or do something insolent.

"What do you want?" the mistress asked.

"Good day, mistress! I have come more for this, mistress, to ask you for something. For timber, mistress. I want to build Stepan an izba, but have no timber. You might give us some boards."

"Why not? You can have them."

Maxim's face beamed.

"I must build an izba, and have no timber. The worst of things! One sits down to eat cabbage soup, and there is no soup. He-he. Boards . . . deals . . . Semka was insolent. . . . But don't be angry, mistress. He's a fool, a great fool. Foolishness has not left his head yet. The lads are like that. Well, mistress, so I may come to fetch timber?"

"Come."

"So you'll have the goodness to tell Felix Adamovich. God grant you good health! Now Stepka will have an izba."

"Only, Zhurkin, I'll take dear for it. I don't sell timber, as you know very well, I require it for myself, and if I sell any I take dear for it."

Maxim's face grew long.

"That is . . . how?"

"Thus. First, the money must be paid at once, and secondly."

"I don't want it for money?"

"Then how do you want it?"

"It's well known how. . . . You know very well."

What money has a muzhik nowadays? A grosh,\* and not even that."

"I give nothing gratis."

Maxim squeezed his cap in his fist and looked up at the ceiling.

"Is what you say serious?" he asked after a short silence.

"Quite serious. Have you anything more to say?"

"What should I have to say? If you won't give me timber, why should I speak to you? Good-bye. Only you're wrong not to give me the timber. . . . You will regret it. . . . It's all one to me, but you will regret it. . . . Is Stepan in the stables?"

"I don't know."

Maxim looked significantly at the mistress, coughed, hesitated and left the room. His face twitched with wrath.

"So that's the sort of rascal you are!" he thought, and went to the stables.

At that time Stepan, seated on a bench in the stable, was lazily cleaning the side of a horse that was standing in front of him. Maxim did not go into the stable but stood at the door.

"Stepan!" he called.

Stepan did not answer nor did he look at his father. The horse moved to and fro.

"Get ready and come home!" Maxim said.

"I don't want to."

"How dare you say that to me!"

"Seems I dare, since I have said it."

"I order you!"

Stepan jumped up and slammed the stable door in Maxim's face.

\* A copper coin worth about three farthings.

In the evening a boy came running from the village to tell Stepan that Maxim had turned Maria out of the house and that Maria did not know where she could pass the night.

"She is now sitting near the church crying," the boy said, "and people are collected round her and are abusing you."

Early next morning when all were still asleep in the mistress's house, Stepan put on his old clothes and went to the village. The church bells were ringing for the liturgy. It was a Sunday morning, bright and gay—one had only to live and rejoice! Stepan passed by the church, looked dully at the belfry and walked on towards the pub. Unfortunately the pub opened earlier than the church. When he entered the pub, there were already men drinking by the bar.

"Vodka!" Stepan ordered.

They served him vodka. He drank it, sat for some time and drank again. Stepan got drunk and treated the others. A noisy drinking bout began.

"What wages does Strelchika pay you?" Sidor asked.

"As much as she ought to. Drink, ass!"

"That's all right. A happy holiday Stepan Maximych! A happy Sunday! What are you doing?"

"And I—and I am drinking too. . . ."

"Pleased to hear it. . . . All this, Stepan Maximych, candidly speaking, is very fortunate and seductive! And allow me to ask do you receive ten roubles?"

"Ha-ha! Is it possible for a gentleman to live on ten roubles? How can you think of it? He receives a hundred."

Stepan looked round at the speaker and recognized his brother Semion, who was sitting at a table in the corner drinking. The drunken visage of the cantor Manaficilov, smiling maliciously, peered out from behind Semion.

"Allow me to ask you, sir," Semion said taking off his cap, "has the mistress fine horses? Do they please you?"

Stepan silently poured himself out a glass of vodka, and silently drank it off.

"They must be very fine," Semion continued. "It's only a pity that there is no coachman. Without a coachman it's not the same thing."

Manaficilov came up to Stepan and shook his head.

"You are. . . . You are. . . . a swine!" he said. "A swine! Don't you think it a sin? Good Orthodox Christians! Is it not a sin for him? What is written in the Scriptures? Eh?"

"Leave off! Fool!"

"Fool. . . . For that you're wise. A coachman but not for horses. He! He! She gives you coffee. I suppose?"

Stepan struck out and hit Manaficilov's big head with a bottle. Manaficilov staggered, but continued:

"Love. What feeling it is. . . . Fff! . . . What a pity you can't get married! You'd be a gentleman then. Why, boys, what a fine gentleman he'd make. A strict gentleman, a developed gentleman."

There was laughter. Stepan struck out and for the second time he hit the bottle against the same head! Manaficilov staggered, and this time he fell.

"Why are you fighting?" Semion asked, coming up to his brother. "First get married, then you can

fight ! Boys, why is he fighting ? Why are you fighting, I ask you again ? "

Semion screwed up his eyes and catching hold of Stepan by the breast of his coat, gave him a blow in the pit of the stomach. Manaficilov got up and waved his long fingers about before Stepan's eyes.

" Boys ! A fight ! By God, a fight ! Come on ! "

The pub became noisy. The talk was mixed with laughter.

People collected at the door of the public house. Stepan seized Manaficilov by the collar and hurled him towards the door. The cantor shrieked and rolled down the steps like a ball. The laughter became louder. The pub was crowded with people. Sidor, meddling in what did not concern him, struck Stepan on the back without knowing why he did it. Stepan seized Semion by the shoulders and flung him out of the door. Semion hit his head against the door post, ran down the steps and fell with his wet face in the dust. His brother ran after him and began dancing on his stomach. He danced with fury, with delight, jumping high into the air. He jumped for a long time. . . .

The church bells rang for the Communion service. Stepan looked round. He was surrounded by grinning faces, each more drunken than the others. There were many grinning faces. Semion, dishevelled and blood-stained, was rising from the ground with clenched fists and a brutal face. Manaficilov still lay in the dust crying. The dust had glued up his eyes. All around there was the devil only knows what !

Stepan gave a start, grew pale and set off running like a madman. The others chased after him.

"Catch him! Catch him!" they shouted.  
"Hold him! He's a murderer!"

Stepan was seized with terror. He thought that if he was caught he would be killed. He ran faster.

"Catch him! Hold him!"

He ran, not knowing whither, and came to his father's house. The gates were wide open and the two halves swung about in the wind. He ran into the yard.

Three paces from the gate his Maria was sitting on a heap of chips and wood-shavings. She sat there never raising her eyes from the ground, with her legs tucked under her and her helpless arms stretched out. At the sight of Maria a bright thought suddenly glanced through Stepan's muddled and drunken head.

To run away, to run far away with that deadly pale, down-trodden, but dearly loved woman. To run far away from those monsters—for example, to Kuban. If uncle Peter's letters can be believed, one can live in clover in the Kuban steppes. Life is broader there, summer is longer and the people more enterprising. . . . At first they, Maria and he, would go out as labourers, but afterwards they would get their own land. No bald-headed Maxim with his gipsy eyes would be there, nor would that spiteful and drunken, grinning face of Semion be there.

With these thoughts he went up to Maria and stopped before her. But his head was giddy with drink, coloured spots danced before his eyes, he felt pain in his whole body. He could scarcely stand on his legs.

"Is Kuban . . . that is . . ." he said and he felt that his tongue was losing the power of speech. "To

Kuban . . . to Uncle Peter. . . . You know? Who wrote letters. . . .”

But it was not to be! Kuban crumbled away to dust and ashes. Maria raised her entreating eyes to his pale crazy face half hidden under his long unkempt hair and she rose. . . . Her lips trembled. . . .

“ Is it you, brigand ? ” she said. “ You. You’ve had your head split in the pub? Accursed? You’re my tormentor. May you be tormented in the next world as you’ve sucked everything out of me here! You have killed me, poor orphan ! ”

“ Hold your tongue ! ”

“ Cruel people! You’re not sorry for Christian souls. You brigands have tortured my whole body. You are a soul-destroyer, Stiopka ! The Mother of God will punish you ! First wait ! This will not be for nothing ! You think only, I am tormented ! Don’t think it. . . . You’ll be tormented for. . . .”

Stepan blinked and staggered.

“ Hold your tongue ! Will you ! For Christ’s sake ! ”

“ Drunkard ! I know on whose money you have got drunk. I know it, brigand ! Are you drinking from delight? You must be gay ? ”

“ Hold your tongue, Mashka ! Now then. . . .”

“ Why have you come? What do you want? Have you come to boast? We know it without any of your boasting. . . . The whole world knows it! Never fear, your eyes must prick all day long, you ungodly fellow.”

Stepan stamped his foot, staggered, and his eyes flashed as he gave Maria a push with his elbow.

“ Don’t you hear ! Hold your tongue ! Don’t harrow my heart ! ”

"I will speak! Do you want to fight? Well then! Beat me! Beat the orphan! There is but one end. . . . What caresses have I to expect? You know how to beat. . . . Finish me, brigand! What use am I to you? You have the mistress now . . . a rich one. A beautiful one. I'm only a serf, and she's a noble lady! Why don't you beat me, brigand!"

Stepan struck out with his whole strength and hit Maria's face, which was distorted with rage, with his fist. His drunken blow fell on her temple. Maria staggered and fell to the earth without uttering a sound. As she fell Stepan struck her again on the breast.

The husband bent over the still warm but dead body of his wife and looked with dim eyes at her face, so worn with suffering, and, unable to understand anything, he sat down near the corpse.

The sun was already high in the sky and burnt. The wind was hot. . . . The sultry air was filled with oppressive sadness, when the trembling people came in large crowds and surrounded Stepan and Maria. . . . They saw and understood that there was a murder here, but they could not believe their own eyes. Stepan looked round with dim eyes, grinding his teeth and mumbling disconnected words. Nobody undertook to bind him. Maxim, Semion and Mana-ficilov stood in the crowd pressing close together.

"Why did he do it?" they asked, all pale as death. His mother ran about vociferating.

The mistress was informed of what had happened. The mistress groaned and took up a phial of spirits of wine, but she did not fall down senseless.

"What terrible people!" she murmured. "Ach, what people! Worthless! Very well, I will teach

them ! They shall know now what sort of a bird I am ! ”

Rzhevetsky came to console her. He was able to console her and he again resumed the place from which he had been ousted by the mistress's caprice for Stepan. The place was lucrative, warm and one that was most suitable for him. Ten times a year he was turned off from this place, and ten times he was paid smart-money, and not a little was paid him.

## ONCE A YEAR

THE Princess's small three-windowed house has a festive look. It seems to have grown younger. The road leading to the door has been carefully swept, the gates are open and the Venetian shutters of all the windows have been raised. The freshly washed panes glitter timidly in the spring sun-rays. . . . The old hall-porter Mark is standing on duty at the front door. He is old and decrepit, and dressed in a moth-eaten livery. His sharply pointed chin, which had taken his trembling hands all the morning to shave, his freshly polished boots, and the crested buttons of his livery also reflect the sunlight. Mark has only just crept out of his little room. It is the Princess's name-day, and he must open the door to the visitors and announce them as they arrive. In the hall there is not the usual smell of coffee grounds, nor of fast-soup, but of some sort of scent that reminds one of egg soap. All the rooms have been carefully tidied. The curtains have been hung up, the muslin has been taken off the pictures, the splintered floors have been well washed. Julka, the cat with her kittens, and the chickens, have been shut up till the evening in the kitchen.

The Princess herself, the owner of this three-windowed little house, a stooping wrinkled old woman, is seated in a large arm-chair and from time to time arranges the folds of her white muslin dress. The single rose that is pinned to her withered breast alone seems to tell that there is still youth in this world. The

Princess is expecting visitors to come and congratulate her. Baron Tromb and his son, Prince Khalakhadze, the Chamberlain Burlastov, her cousin General Butkov and many others are sure to come. There will be twenty at least. They will come and fill her drawing-room with their talk. Prince Khalakhadze will sing something and General Butkov will twice ask her to give him the rose. . . . She knows well how to behave in the presence of such guests. Unapproachableness, stateliness and good breeding would appear in all her movements. Among these who would come there were also sure to be the merchants Khtulkin and Pereulkov ; for these gentlemen a sheet of paper and a pen have been placed in the ante-room. Every one in the right place. They may sign their names and go away.

It is mid-day. The Princess arranges her dress and the rose. She listens : "does nobody ring ?" A carriage drives past noisily. "Will it stop?" Five minutes pass.

"It's not for us," the Princess thinks.

No, Princess, it's not for you. The same thing that had happened last year is repeated. A pitiless thing ! Like last year the Princess goes to her room at two o'clock, she smells her salt ammoniac and cries :

"Nobody has come ! Nobody !"

Old Mark fusses about round the Princess. He is no less grieved : the people are spoilt ! Formerly they swarmed in the drawing-room like flies, and now. . . .

"Nobody has come !" the Princess laments. "Neither the Baron nor Prince Khalakhadze, not George Buvetsky. . . . They have all left me ! And if I had not been there, what would have become of them ? They all owe their happiness to me, their

careers—only to me. What would have become of them without me?"

"What would have become of them, madam?" Mark echoed.

"I ask for no gratitude. I don't require it. I require feeling. Good Lord, what an affront! Oh, what an insult. Even my nephew, Jean, did not come. Why did he not come? What harm have I done him? I paid all his debts, I arranged a marriage for his sister, Tania, with a good man. Jean has cost me dear. I have kept the word I gave my brother, Jean's father. . . . What I spent on him . . . you yourself know."

"And for their parents, your Excellency, you were like a mother, too!"

"And now . . . this is their gratitude! Oh, people!"

"At three o'clock, as it had happened last year, the Princess had a hysterical attack. Mark, greatly alarmed, puts on his gallooned hat and after long bargaining drives off to nephew Jean's. By good luck the rooms in which Prince Jean lives are not far off. Mark finds the Prince lolling on his bed. Jean has only just returned from last night's carouse. His bloated face is scarlet, there is sweat on his brow. There are noises in his head and a revolution in his stomach. He would be glad to sleep, but he can't, he feels squeamish. His weary eyes are fixed on the wash-basin which is filled to the brim with slops and soapy water.

Mark enters the dirty room and with a fastidious shrug approaches the bed timidly.

"This is not right, Ivan Mikhailitch!" he says, shaking his head reproachfully. "This is not right, sir."

"What's not right?"

" Why did you not come to congratulate your aunt on her name-day? Is that right? "

" Go to the devil! " Jean says without taking his eyes off the soapy water.

" Is this not very hurtful for your aunt? Eh? Oh, your Excellency Ivan Mikhailitch, you have no feeling! What is your reason for grieving her so? "

" I don't pay visits. . . . Tell her that. . . . That custom is long out of fashion. . . . We have no time to drive about. You can drive about yourselves if you have nothing to do, and leave me in peace. . . . The deuce take you off. I want to sleep. . . ."

" You want to sleep. . . . You turn your face away. You're ashamed to look into my eyes? "

" Well. . . . Hush. . . . Get along, you scab! "

Mark begins to blink his eyes rapidly. There is a lengthy silence.

" Batiouchka, won't you go to congratulate your aunt? " he says coaxingly. " She is crying and tossing about on her bed. . . . Be so kind, show her your respect. . . . Batiouchka, drive there! "

" I won't go. Why should I go? Besides, I have no time. What am I to do with an old maid? "

" Your Excellency, do go! Batiouchka, show your respect. Have the goodness! She's terribly hurt by your—how should I call it—ingratitude and heartlessness! "

Mark wipes his eyes with his hands.

" Be so good."

" Hm. . . . Will there be cognac? " Jean asks.

" There will be, Batiouchka, your Excellency."

" So. . . . Hm . . . " The Prince winked.

" Well, and will there be a hundred roubles? " he asked.

"That's quite impossible. Your Excellency does not fail to know we have not the same capital we used to have. . . . We have been ruined by our relations, Ivan Mikhailitch. When we had money everybody paid court to us, but now. . . . It's the will of God."

"How much did I take from you for my visit last year? I took two hundred roubles. And now you haven't even got one hundred? You're cracking jokes, old scare-crow! Rummage about in the old girl's things, you'll find it. . . . Besides, go to the devil. I want to sleep."

"Be so very kind, your Excellency. She's old and weak. . . . Her soul scarcely keeps in her body. Have pity on her, Ivan Mikhailitch, your Excellency."

Jean is inexorable. Mark begins to bargain. At about five o'clock Jean gives in, puts on his dress-coat and drives off to the Princess's. . . .

"Ma Tante," he says pressing his lips to her hand and choking.

And sitting down on the sofa he begins last year's conversation.

"Marie Kryshkina, ma tante, has received a letter from Nice. . . . From her hubby. Ah, what do you think of him. He describes quite freely a duel he has had with an Englishman about some sort of singer. . . . I've forgotten her name . . . "

"Is it possible?"

The Princess turns up her eyes, clasps her hands and with astonishment mixed with a certain amount of horror she repeats:

"Is it possible?"

"Yes. . . . He fights duels, he runs after singing girls, and here's his wife . . . pining away and drying

up for his lordship. I don't understand such people, ma tante ! ”

The happy Princess gets nearer to hear on the sofa and this conversation drags on. . . . Tea and cognac are served.

And at the time that the happy Princess is listening to Jean, laughing, terrified and astonished, old Mark is rummaging in her trunks and collected rouble notes. Prince Jean has made great concessions. He must be paid only fifty roubles. But in order to pay these fifty roubles, more than one trunk must be overhauled.

## AN UNPREJUDICED GIRL

MAXIM KUZMITSCH SALIUTOV was tall, broad-shouldered and stately. His build could be described with confidence as athletic. His strength was enormous. He could bend a twenty copeck piece, tear a young tree up by the roots, he could lift a weight with his teeth, and swore that there was not a man on earth who could dare to wrestle with him. He was brave and bold. On the other hand, everybody was afraid of him, and grew pale when he was angry. Men and women screamed and got red when he pressed their hands ; it was painful !! His fine baritone voice could not be heard, because he deafened you. . . . A powerful man ! I don't know another like him.

And this prodigious, 'superhuman, bovine strength appeared as nothing—like a crushed rat—when Maxim Kuzmitch proposed to Elena Gavrilovna ! Maxim Kuzmitch grew pale, blushed, trembled and was unable even to lift a chair when he had to squeeze out of his large mouth : "I love you !" His strength vanished, and his huge body was transformed into a big empty vessel.

He proposed on the skating rink. She flew over the ice with the lightness of a feather and he pursuing her trembled, whispered and almost fainted. Suffering was written on his face. . . . His skilful, agile legs bent and faltered when he had to cut some intricate figure on the ice. . . . Do you think he feared a refusal ? No. Elena Gavrilovna loved him and longed for the offer of

his hand and heart. She, a small, pretty brunette, was ready at any moment to be consumed with impatience. . . . He was thirty years old, his rank was not high, he had not much money, but he was handsome, witty, adroit. He was an excellent dancer, a splendid shot. . . . Nobody rode better than he did. Once, when walking with her, he jumped over a ditch which would have been difficult for any English race-horse.

It was impossible not to love such a man !

He knew that he was loved. He was sure of it. He suffered from one thought. . . . That thought stifled his brain, drove him mad, made him cry and prevented him from drinking, eating and sleeping. . . . It poisoned his life. He swore that he loved her, and at that very moment it agitated his brain and made his temples throb.

“ Will you be my wife ? ” he said to Elena Gavrilovna.  
“ I love you ! Madly ! Passionately ! ”

And at that very moment he thought :

“ Have I the right to be her husband ? No, I have not. If she only knew my extraction, if anybody told her of my past, she would give me a box on the ear. A disgraceful, an unfortunate past. She, illustrious, rich, well-educated would despise me, if she only knew what sort of a bird I am.”

When Elena Gavrilovna threw herself on his neck and swore that she loved him, he did not feel happy.

His thought poisoned everything. . . . When he was returning home from the skating rink he bit his lips and thought :

“ I’m a scoundrel. If I were an honest man, I would tell her everything—everything ! Before proposing I ought to have confided my secret to her, but I did not do so. Therefore I am a blackguard and a scoundrel.”

Elena Gavrilovna's parents consented to her marriage with Maxim Kuzmitch. They liked the athlete. He was deferential and he had good prospects as a government official. Elena Gavrilovna was in the seventh heaven. She was happy. For all that the poor athlete was far from happy. Until the very wedding day he was tormented by the same thoughts he had had when he proposed. . . .

One of his friends, who knew all his past as well as his five fingers, troubled him too. He was obliged to give his friend nearly the whole of his salary.

"Treat me to dinner at 'The Hermitage,'" his friend said, "or I'll tell everybody. . . . And lend me twenty-five roubles."

Poor Maxim Kuzmitch grew thin and emaciated . . . His cheeks were sunken, his fists became veined. His thought made him ill. If it had not been for the beloved girl, he would have shot himself. . . .

"I am a scoundrel, a blackguard," he kept thinking. "I must explain everything to her before the wedding. Let her disdain me!"

But he did not explain before the wedding : he had not the courage.

And the thought that after the explanation he would have to part from that beloved girl was the most terrible of all his thoughts.

The wedding evening arrived. The young couple were married, congratulated and everybody was amazed at their happiness. Poor Maxim Kuzmitch accepted the congratulations, drank, danced and laughed, but was terribly unhappy.

"I'm a beast ; but I'll force myself to explain everything. We have been married, but it is still not too late. We can part."

And he explained.

When the desired hour arrived and the young couple were conducted to the nuptial chamber, his conscience and his honesty triumphed. . . . Pale, trembling, hardly breathing and forgetting their relationship, Maxim Kuzmitch came up to her timidly and taking her hand, he said :

“ Before we belong . . . to each other . . . I must . . . explain something. . . . ”

“ What is the matter with you, Max? You are pale. All these days you have been pale, silent. Are you ill? ”

“ I . . . must tell you everything. Lolya, let us sit down. I must astonish you, I must poison your whole happiness . . . but what am I to do? Duty comes before everything. I will tell you all about my past. . . . ”

Lelya opened her eyes very wide and smiled.

“ Well, tell it me then. . . . Only quicker, please, and don’t tremble so.”

“ I was b-b-born in Tam-tam-bov. . . . My parents were undistinguished and terribly poor. . . . I will tell you what sort of a bird I am. You will be terrified. Stop—you will see—I was a beggar. . . . As a boy I sold apples . . . pears. . . . ”

“ You did? ”

“ You are horrified? But, my dear, that is not so horrible. Oh, how wretched I am. You will curse me when you know.”

“ But what is it? ”

“ For twenty years . . . I was . . . was . . . forgive me—don’t drive me away from you—I was a clown in a circus! ”

“ You! A clown! ”

Saliutov expecting his ears boxed, covered his pale face with his hands. He was almost fainting.

" You—a clown ! "

Lelya fell off the couch—jumped up and ran off.

What was the matter with her ? She caught hold of her stomach, began running about the bedroom, filling the room with peals of laughter that resembled hysteria.

" Ha-ha-ha. . . . You were a clown ! . . . You ? Maximka ! Golubtchik ! Perform something ! Prove that you were one ! Ha-ha-ha ! Golubtchik !

She rushed at Saliutov and threw her arms round him.

" Perform something ! My darling ! Golubtchik ! "

" Unhappy girl, you laugh ? You despise me ? "

" Do something ! Where you a rope-walker too ? Come now ! "

She covered her husband's face with kisses, she nestled up close to him. She coaxed him. It did not appear as if she were angry. He, quite unable to understand it, but happy, acquiesced in his wife's request.

Going up to the bed he counted three and stood on his head resting it on the edge of the bed.

" Bravo, Max ! Bis ! Ha-ha ! Golubtchik ! Again ! "

Max shook slightly, jumped from the bed in the same position and began walking about the room on his hands.

In the morning Lelya's parents were terribly surprised.

" Who can be knocking in that way upstairs ? " they asked each other—" the young couple are still

asleep. It must be the servants playing pranks. How they are romping ! What scamps ! ”

*Papasha* went upstairs, but did not find any servants there.

To his great astonishment the noise came from the young couple’s room. . . . He stood some time at the door, shrugged his shoulders and then opened it a little. Peeping into the bedroom through the chink he shrunk back and almost died from astonishment : in the middle of the room Maxim Kuzmitch was making the most desperate *salte mortale* in the air. Lelya was standing near him clapping her hands. Both their faces were radiant with happiness.

## VANKA

It was past one o'clock in the night.

The Commercial Councillor Ivan Vasiliovitch Kotlov came out of "Slaviansky Bazaar" restaurant wandered along the Nikolsky street towards the Kremlin. It was a fine starlit night. The stars twinkled gaily from behind the tufts and scraps of cloud, as if they were pleased to look at the earth. The air was calm and transparent.

"The izvozchiks are expensive near the restaurants," Kotlov thought, "I must go on a little. . . . They'll be cheaper farther on. . . . Besides I ought to walk : I have eaten too much and I'm drunk."

Near the Kremlin he hired a night Vanka.\*

"To Yakimanka !" he commanded.

Vanka, a young fellow of about twenty-five, smacked his lips and pulled at the reins lazily. The little horse started from its place and jogged on at a gentle trot. . . . Kotlov had hit upon a real and very typical Vanka. Looking at his sleepy, thick-skinned pimply face one would at once define him as an izvozchik.

They drove through the Kremlin.

"What o'clock is it ?" Vanka asked.

"Going on to two," the Commercial Councillor answered.

"So. . . . It's getting warmer ! It was cold, but now it's again warmer. . . . Limping again, you brute ! Eh, eh, eh ! . . . Convict !"

\* Vanka is the popular name given to all izvozchiks, the drivers of hackney drozhkies and sledges.

The izvozchik rose slightly and the lash of his whip passed over the horse's back.

"Winter!" he continued seating himself more comfortably and turning towards his fare. "Don't like it! I'm too chilly! I stand out in the frost, get benumbed all over, and shiver. The first cold gust and my mug gets swelled. . . . I've a such-like constitution. I'm unused!"

"Get used to it. . . . With your trade, brother, you must get used to it. . . ."

"A man can get used to everything, that's certain your honour. . . . But while you get used to it, you can get frozen twenty times. . . . I'm a delicate man, I'm spoilt, your honour. . . . My father and mother spoilt me. They never thought I would have to be an izvozchik. They let delicacy into me. God rest their souls! As they gave birth to me on the warm stove, so to my tenth year they never took me off it. I lay on the stove and munched pies, like a well fed-pig. . . . I was 'their favourite. . . . They dressed me in the best manner. They taught me to read for delicacy. They would not let me go about barefoot: 'the little fellow will catch cold!' As though I was not a muzhik, but a gentleman. If father beat me, mother cried. . . . If mother beat me, father was sorry. When I went into the woods with father for brushwood, mother wrapped me up in three fur coats as if I was going to Moscow or to Kiev. . . ."

"Did you live well then?"

"We lived like all muzhiks. . . . We thanked God when the day was over. We weren't rich, and thank God, we did not die of hunger. We lived, sir, in the family, therefore like one family. . . . My grandfather was alive then, and two sons lived with him. One son,

that is my father, was married, the other unmarried. And I was the only little lad to delight the whole family. Grand-dad also spoilt me. Grand-dad, you know, had money hidden away . . . and he had thought in his head I should not follow the muzhik's calling. 'Petrukha,' he would say, 'I'll open a shop for you. Grow up !' They let delicacy into me, they let it in, they coddled and coddled till at last such a perplexity arose, that led to no delicacy. . . . My uncle, grand-dad's son, and father's brother, went and stole all grand-dad's money. These were two thousand roubles . . . From the day he stole it the ruin began. . . . The horses were sold, the cows were sold. Father and grand-dad went out as labourers. You know how it is with us peasants. . . . And I, God's servant, went as a shepherd . . . There's delicacy for you ! "

" Well, and your uncle ? What became of him ? "

" He's all right . . . as it should be. . . . He leased an inn on the high road and lived in it. Five years later he married a rich Serpukhov tradesman's daughter. He got some eight thousand with her. . . . After the wedding the inn burnt down. . . . Why shouldn't it burn down, as it was insured in a company ? That's how it should be. And after the fire he went to Moscow and opened a grocery shop there. . . . Now, they say, he has become rich, and there's no approaching him. Our muzhiks, from Khavarovo, have seen him, they say. I haven't seen him. His family name is Kotlov, and his name and patronyme are Ivan Vasilov. . . . Haven't you heard it ? "

" No. . . . Well, drive a bit faster ! "

" Ivan Vasilov has wronged us, ukh ! how he wronged us ! He ruined us and scattered us over the world. If not for him, would I ever have frozen here,

with my constitution, with my weakness ? I would have lived and felt well in my own little village. . . . Ekh ! They are ringing for matins. . . . I would like to pray to Lord God—to punish him for all my suffering. . . . Well, but God be with him ! May God forgive him ! We can suffer on ! ”

“ To the right, to that house-porch ! ”

“ Very good. . . . Well, we’ve arrived at last. An extra copper for the tale might be added. . . . ”

Kotlov took a fifteen copeck piece out of his pocket and gave it to Vanka.

“ You ought to add something ! How well I drove you ! And it’s too. . . . ”

“ That’s enough for you ! ”

The gentleman pulled the bell and a moment later he disappeared behind the carved oak door.

The izvozchik jumped on to the coach-box and drove slowly back. . . . A cold wind was blowing. Vanka knit his brows and shoved his benumbed hands into his tattered sleeves.

He was not used to the cold. . . . He had been spoilt.

## AT THE MILL.

The miller Alexey Biryukov, a robust, squat, middle-aged man, who resembled in face and figure those rough thick-skinned sailors of whom children dream after reading Jules Verne, was seated at the threshold of his cottage lazily sucking his extinguished pipe. This day he was wearing grey trousers made of coarse soldier's cloth, and large heavy boots, but he was without a coat and without a cap, although the weather was quite autumnal—damp and cold. Through his unbuttoned waistcoat the damp mist could penetrate freely, but the miller's large body—hard as a corn—evidently did not feel the cold. As usual, his red, fleshy face looked apathetic and slabby, as though he were half asleep, his small eyes, sunk in fat, looked round morosely from under his heavy brows, now at the dike then at the two barns with their sheds, then at the old and deformed white-willows.

Near the barns two monks were bustling about. One was Cleopa, a tall grey old man in a cassock all bespattered with mud and a well-worn skull-cap, and the other was Diodorus, black bearded and swarthy, evidently a Georgian, dressed in an ordinary peasant's sheep-skin coat. They were unloading from a cart the sacks of rye they had brought to be ground. Seated on the dirty grass a short way from them was Evsey, a young, moustacheless lad in a torn short sheepskin coat; he was quite drunk. He was crumpling in his hands a fishing net and pretended to be mending it.

For a long time the miller looked around in silence and then fixing his eyes on the monks, who were carrying the sacks, he said in a deep bass voice:

"Eh ! You monks, why do you catch fish in the river ? Who allowed you ? "

The monks did not answer, nor did they even look at the miller. He remained silent a short time, then he lit his pipe and continued :

" You not only yourselves fish, but you allow the inhabitants of the suburb to do so too. I have leased the river from the suburb and from you, I pay you money, consequently the fish are mine, and nobody has any right to catch it. You pray to God, but don't consider it a sin to steal."

The miller yawned, was silent, and then began to grumble again.

" So that's the sort of fashion you follow ! You think because you are monks, you have become saints and there is no Court of Justice for you. But I'll send in a plaint to the Justice of the Peace. The Justice of the Peace will pay no attention to your cassock, he'll make you sit in a cold cell. Or else I'll settle the matter without a Justice of the Peace. If I catch you on the river I'll give you such a cudgelling, that you won't want fish again to the Judgment Day."

" You ought not to use such words, Alexey Doro-feich !" Cleopa said in a soft tenor voice. " Good people, who fear God, don't use such words to a dog, and we are monks ! "

" Monks !" the miller mimicked. " You wanted fish ? Did you ? Then you had to buy it of me, and not steal it ! "

" Good Lord ! As if we ever steal !" Cleopa said frowning. " Why such words ? It is true our lay-brothers caught fish, but they had received permission from the Father Archimandrite to do so. The Father Archimandrite reasons thus : that the money received

from you is not for all the fish, but only for the right to lay nets from our bank. The whole river has not been given to you. . . . It does not belong to you or to us, but to God. . . . ”

“ The Archimandrite is no better than you are,” the miller continued to grumble, tapping his pipe against his boot, “ he also likes to trim ! But I make no distinctions. For me the Archimandrite is no better than you, or than Evsey, there ! If I find him on the river he’ll catch it too ! ”

“ If you want to thrash the monks you may if you like. For us it will be better in the next world. You have already thrashed Vissarion and Antip, so you may beat the others.”

“ Hold your tongue, don’t touch him ! ” Diodorus whispered pulling Cleopa’s sleeve.

Cleopa restrained himself, was silent and began carrying the sacks ; the miller however continued to scold. He grumbled lazily, sucking his pipe and spitting after each phrase. When he had exhausted the fish question, he remembered two sacks belonging to him that it appeared the monks had swindled him out of, and he began to scold about the sacks, then noticing that Evsey was drunk and did not work, he left the monks in peace and attacked his labourer, deafening, the air with the choicest and most horrible abuse.

At first the monks restrained themselves only sighing loudly, but soon Cleopa could stand it no longer. He clasped his hands and said in a lachrymose voice :

“ Holy Lord, there is nothing harder for me to obey than to come to the mill ! It is real hell ! Hell, truly hell ! ”

“ You’d better not come then ! ” the miller snapped.

“ Heavenly Tsaritza, I’d be glad not to come here,

but where can we find another mill? You know very well, that besides yours there's not another mill round about here! One might die of hunger or eat unground grain!"

The miller paid no attention but continued to shower oaths on all sides. It was evident that to scold or to swear was as much a habit with him, as the sucking of his pipe.

"If you would only not mention the devil," Cleopa implored blinking with fright. "Well, do have the goodness to be quiet!"

The miller was soon silent, but not because Cleopa implored. An old woman appeared on the dike; she was small, round, with a good-natured face, she wore a strange sort of striped cloak that looked like the back of a beetle. She carried a small bundle and supported herself on a little stick.

"Good health to you, batyushka, good health to you little fathers!" she lisped bowing low to the monks. "May God help you! Good health to you Aleshenka! Good health to you Evseyushka!"

"Good health to you, mamenka," the miller mumbled frowning and without looking at the old woman.

"I have come to visit you, batyushka," she said smiling and looking affectionately into the miller's face. "It's long since I saw you last. I think we have not met since the Assumption of the Holy Virgin . . . Pleased or not pleased you must receive me! You seem to have grown thinner."

The little old woman sat down next to the miller, and by the side of that huge man, she looked even more like a beetle in her little striped coat.

"Yes, from the day of the Assumption!" she continued. "I've been wearying to see you, my

whole soul has been aching for my little son, but whenever I wanted to come it either rained, or I was poorly. . . ."

"Have you come from the suburb, now?" the miller asked morosely.

"Yes, from the suburb, straight from home. . . ."

"With your complaints and your constitution you ought to remain at home, and not go about visiting. Well, why have you come? Are you not sorry for your shoes?"

"I've come to have a look at you. . . . I have only two sons," she said addressing the monks, "this one and Vasili, who lives in the suburb. Only two. For them it is all the same if I am alive or dead, but they are my own, my consolation. . . . They can get on without me, but I don't think I could live a day without them. But only now, little father, I've grown old, it's difficult to come to him from the suburb."

Silence followed those words. The monks carried the last sack into the barn and then sat down in the cart to rest. Drunken Evsey continued to crumple the fishing net and nodded.

"You've come at the wrong time, mamenka," the miller said. "I must drive off to Karyazhino at once."

"Go! God speed you!" the old woman sighed. "Of course you can't neglect your business on my account. . . . I shall rest here for an hour and then go back. . . . Aleshenka, Vasya and the children send you greetings."

"He still swigs vodka, I suppose?"

"Not very much, but he drinks. There's no cause to conceal sin, he drinks. You yourself know he can't drink much, he hasn't the wherewithal, but sometimes good people treat him. . . . Aleshenka, his life is

wretched ! Looking at him I'm terribly worried. . . . There's nothing to eat, the children in tatters, he himself is ashamed to show his nose in the street, his trousers are all in holes and he has no boots. . . . All six of us sleep in one room. Such poverty, such poverty ! Nothing worse can be imagined. I have come to ask you to help. Aleshenka, in consideration of an old woman, help Vasili. . . . Remember he's your brother ! ”

The miller remained silent and looked to one side.

“ He is poor, but you thank the Lord ! The mill is your own, and you have kitchen-gardens and you trade in fish. The Lord has given you wisdom, and exalted you above others, and bestowed on you plenty. . . . You are also alone. . . . But Vasya has four children, and I, accursed old thing, am a weight on his neck, and his wages are only seven roubles. How can he feed us all ? Help us ! . . . ”

The miller remained silent and filled his pipe carefully.

“ Give something ? ” the old woman begged.

The miller was silent, as if his mouth were full of water. Without waiting for an answer the old woman sighed, glanced round at the monks and at Evsey, rose and said :

“ Well, well, may God protect you, don't give anything. I know you would give nothing. . . . I came to you more on Nazar Andreich's account. . . . Aleshenka, he is crying bitterly ! He kisses my hands and is always asking me to come to you and entreat.”

“ What does he want ? ”

“ He begs you to pay him your debt. He says he brought you rye to be milled and you haven't given it back.”

“ It's not your business, mamanka, to meddle in

other people's affairs," the miller growled. "Your business is to pray to God."

"I pray, but somehow God does not hear my prayers. Vasili is a beggar, I beg and go about in another person's cloak. You live well, but God knows you, and what a soul you have. Och, Aleshenka, your envious eyes have spoilt you ! In every way you are good for me : you are clever and handsome, and the best of the merchants, but you are not like a real man ! You're unaffable, you never smile, you never say a kind word, you're uncharitable, you're like a beast. . . . What a face you have ! And what people say about you is grief to me ! Only ask the brothers there. Do they lie when they say you suck the people dry, that you violate, that you rob passers-by, at night with your brigand workmen, that you steal horses. . . . Your mill is like a place accursed. . . . Girls and children are afraid to come near it, every creature avoids you. You go by no other name than Cain or Herod. . . ."

"Mamenka your foolish ! "

"Wherever you set your foot, the grass does not grow, wherever you breathe—not an insect will fly. I only hear : 'If only someone would kill him soon, or if the law would punish him !' What is this for a mother to hear ? What ? And you who are my own child, my own blood. . . ."

"However, it's time for me to go," the miller said rising. "Good-bye, mamenka ! "

The miller drew a cart out of the coach-house, led a horse out of the stable, pushed it, as if it were a dog, between the shafts, and began to harness it to the cart. The old woman followed him about and gazed into his face blinking tearfully.

Acc. No ..... good-bye;

On up his 'Kaftan.'

Cl. No. .... began to

... ain here wid' God and

B. t forget us. Wait a' moment, I have brought  
a present . . ." she mumbled, lowering her voice  
and untying her bundle. " I went to see the deacon's  
wife yesterday and she treated me to this, and I've  
saved up one for you. . . ."

The old woman stretched out her hand and offered  
her son a small ginger cake.

" Leave off," the miller shouted and pushed her way  
with his hand.

The old woman became confused, dropped the ginger  
cake and wandered off quietly towards the dike. . . .  
This scene produced a painful impression, to say  
nothing of the monks who uttered little cries and raised  
their hands in horror.

Even drunken Evsey was petrified and stared at his  
master with fright. Whether the miller understood  
the expression on the monk's and his workman's  
faces, or whether perhaps it was a feeling which had  
long since been dormant in his breast that moved him,  
but something caused a look that resembled fright to  
pass over his face.

" Mamenka ! " he called after her.

The old woman started and looked round. The miller  
hastily pulled a large leather pouch out of his pocket.

" Here's something for you," he grumbled and pulled  
out of the purse a lump consisting of silver and paper  
money. " Take it."

He turned this lump about in his hand, crumpling it,  
and for some reason he looked back at the monks and  
then crumpled it again. The paper and the silver  
money slipping between his fingers fell one after the  
other again into the pouch, and at last only one twenty  
copeck piece remained in his hand. . . . The miller  
examined it rubbed it between his fingers, grunted,  
grew purple and handed it to his mother.

T BOOK MUST BE RETURNED ON  
R BEFORE THE DATE LAST  
SPECIAL CALLS

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9 NOV 1964